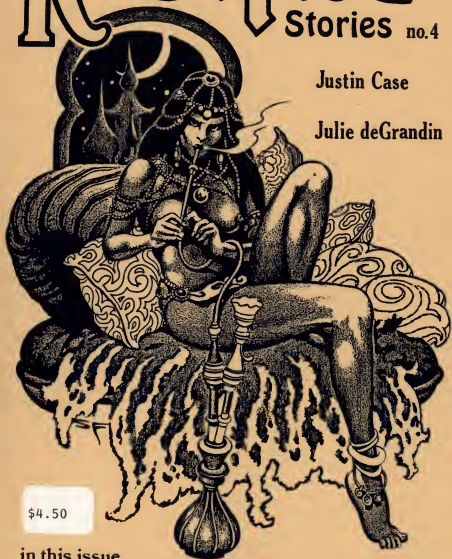


Risque

Stories no.4

Justin Case

Julie deGrandin



\$4.50

in this issue

"Love Slaves of the Sandinista Torture Squad"

RISQUE STORIES

October 1986

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Number Four

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FOREPLAY

Here, panting ones, is Risque Stories #4. There are plenty of racy and ribald treats just waiting for you.

Three Risque regulars team up to bring you "Sixgun Hellcats from Black River" by Hugh B. Cave, Charles Hoffman and Marc A. Cerasini, a hitherto-untold tale of those wild and woolly days of the pulps and the exotic adventurers who wrote them!

Robert E. Howard is represented in this issue with "Miss High Hat," an odd bit of fiction (or something: it's not exactly a story) that is chiefly of interest as evidence of Howard's interest in flagellation porn. His fiction frequently featured what looked like lesbian flagellation scenes, e.g., in the Conan tales "Xuthal of the Dusk" (published as "The Slithering Shadow"), "Red Nails" and "A Witch Shall Be Born". The first of these was the cover story for the September 1933 Weird Tales which, thanks to the Brundage whipping scenes, sold unusually well! Not too surprisingly, the recently published list of Howard's personal library contained several flagellation titles like A History of the Rod, Experiences of Flagellation, and Curiosa of Flagellants and History of Flagellation.

Before the advent of Risque Stories, the closest things to the Spicy

pulps were the "macho mags" like True Men, Man's Peril, etc. (see Neil Wexler, "The Macho Mags," Shudder Stories #2). In the spirit of these outrageous "men's adventure" magazines, we offer N. Leo Lancer's "Love Slaves of the Sandinista Torture Squad."

Will Murray is back with another chapter of spicy pulp history, "The Spicy Sleuths." It only seems fitting that we present a spicy detective tale, something we haven't done before, "Murder in Silhouette," by Wade Wells. That name sounds familiar, you say? Yes, indeed, that's the Spicy pseudonym of the late lamented Manly Wade Wellman, under which his "Stolen Sweets" appeared in Spicy Detective. The present story was obviously intended for the same market, but seems never to have been published. (By the way, Wellman originally wrote it as a straight detective story, and that version is tentatively scheduled to appear in Two-Fisted Detective Stories #2.)

Last and, it is safe to say, least is another adventure of Julie de Grandin, psychic sleuth. Next issue, our winning team of Will Murray and Mike Harris will be back, but in the meantime we'll have to make do.

Robert M. Price
Editor

Sixgun Hellcats from Black River

by Hugh B. Cave, Charles Hoffman and Marc A. Cerasini

Buzzing hungrily in the Mexican heat, a blowfly circled the stalled American car and landed on the neck of the man bent over its exposed innards. Big Sam Walser reared back to slap at it, all but braining himself on the machine's upraised hood.

Despite his quickness, he missed. Slapping a second time, he missed again.

"Damn these monsters! You suppose they're some special breed here in the mountains, Justin?"

Behind the wheel of the old Essex sedan, Justin Case peered up at the towering peak ahead. El Promontorio, it was called on the map he had spread out to study while Sam tried to tease the Essex into behaving itself. They had crossed the border at El Paso and headed south on the road to Chihuahua, then turned off that road at El Sueco. Their destination was a village called Mahuaripa, if there actually was such a place.

Returning his gaze to the man working on the car, Case sadly wagged his head. He was as tall as Sam Walser but not nearly so rugged. Walser looked like a football lineman. With his horn-rimmed glasses Case more closely resembled an owl-headed scarecrow.

"I wish we knew where we are, exactly, Sam."

"Justin--dammit--we're in Mexico!"

"I know that. I even know why we're here, I think."

"Do you?" Walser took another futile swipe at the blowfly and glared again at the car's engine.

"Well, suppose you just tell me, to refresh my memory, while I make like a mechanic."

Case smiled. It had been like this for several days now, the give and take between them. Only casual acquaintances before the start of their expedition, they had become close friends since leaving Chicago.

"All right, Samuel, sir. Begin with the guy who wrote to our mutual friend and editor of Weird Tales, Mr. Farnsworth Wright, Esquire. Says he, 'I was wandering through Mexico in this year of our Lord 1934, and in the shadow of a mountain called El Promontorio--a region, I might add, that is infested with bandits and other most interesting characters--in this village of Mahuaripa, Mr. Editor, I came upon a graveyard in which was a curious stone. A simple stone, mind you, but, yes, most curious. Because on it was crudely carved the name, sir, of one Ambroz Birz. Now, Mr. Wright, as the editor of the world's leading fantasy magazine, Weird Tales, you undoubtedly do not need to be reminded that one of America's most famous writers of fantasy, Mr. Ambrose Bierce, disappeared in Mexico in the year 1913, while supposedly seeking the great Mexican revolutionist Pancho Villa, to write about him or join forces with him. And would not the name Ambroz Birz be a Mexican phonetic spelling of the name Ambrose Bierce? Yes? No? Perhaps? Think about it, Mr. Wright."

Sam Walser thrust his head out from under the car's hood. "How in hell are you able to remember that letter so vividly, Justin? You psychic or something?"

"Sometimes I'm psychic. But I have the letter right here with the map, old boy."

"Oh. Well, you know something?

I'll bet he's right about the bandits."

"There used to be a wonderful old song," said Case, and began singing it. "I am the Bandolero, king with a sword for pillow. I rule the mountains and I claim as contraband what comes my way!" Finishing the song, he scowled through the windshield at his companion. "Those characters we talked to a few miles back, Sam--I have a strong hunch we haven't seen the last of them. Did you notice the look in their eyes when I asked if we were on the right road to Mahuaripa?"

"As we would say were this a tale for Farnsworth: 'a look to haunt the dark chambers of the mind.'"

"Hurry up with that engine, will you? We're sitting ducks here."

"They could have taken us back there," Sam said.

"I know, I know. But maybe they didn't want us there. Maybe it was too far from Mahuaripa."

"Try starting her," Walser said.

Case reached for the starter button with his foot, and the car came to life with such a sputter that Sam Walser leaped back like a moose stung with a cattle prod. But when the engine continued its noisily cheerful music, both men grinned.

Sam dropped the hood, clamped it down, and got back into the car. "Onward and upward," he said after a light swig from the pint bottle of bourbon on the seat between them. "And get on with your narrative, old buddy."

But professional writer Case was not one to string a tale out until it snapped. Driving in silence, he peered ahead for soem hint that they might be approachign the elusive village they had come so far to find. He did say, "Sam, you suppose the great Ambrose Bierce is buried under that gravestone?"

"He could be. Having vanished into thin air somewhere here in Mexico, he's just as likely to be there as anywhere else."

"And do you suppose Howard and Cave found the stone?"

"Now why they disappeared is a much tougher question, if you ask me, Justin. They weren't old, like Bierce. Two responsible young men, relatively smart and sober--why they should have disappeared when Farnsworth sent them down here to find the stone is beyond me."

"So it's really Robert E. Howard and Hugh B. Cave we're looking for, isn't it? I mean, even if the grave is that of Ambrose Bierce, he's dead. What we've got to do is find Cave and Howard alive."

"Or Wright will weep crocodile tears," Walser said. "You realize he has just published a Howard masterpiece in The Valley of the Worm? And a fine Cave cover story, The Black Gargoyle? Farnsworth Wright is counting on two lads for more goodies, and if we let him down on this assignment--" Thrusting his head out the window, he peered ahead through the heat haze and interrupted himself, "Hey, we're coming to something!"

A weather-worn roadside sign said MAHUARIPA. Only that: MAHUARIPA. But both men heaved sighs of relief and let the sighs expand into grins as they approached it. From the City of Chicago, State of Illinois, where Farnsworth Wright had faced them across his desk at the start of this great adventure, the journey had been a long one.

"Ambrose Bierce," Wright had solemnly said. "Imagine what it would mean to Weird Tales to be able to say we've found him! That's what I said to Howard and Cave when I sent them down there to investigate. Now they're missing and I'm sending you two. You musn't fail me, gentlemen."

Mr. Wright was always polite. An editor difficult to please, seldom accepting anything less than a writer's best, but--yes--always polite. "So don't let me down," he had said. "Find Mahuaripa, find

Howard and Cave, and find that grave the reader wrote me about. I'll settle for nothing less."

"If this is Mahuaripa," Case said now, "no wonder we couldn't find it on the map."

"Well, it has a river," said Walser. "Can we get across it, you suppose?"

They descended from the Essex to look the stream over. A board on a post by the side of it bore faded letters conveying the information that it was the Rio Negro. The road became a pair of ruts crookedly winding down through assorted boulders to a yard-wide trickle of water.

"Black River, huh?" Case scowled at it. "I'll bet it's a torrent after a big rain. You suppose it was named for its moods?"

But Walser was not interested in the river. Excitedly pointing to the far bank, he shouted, "Look yonder, Justin! Isn't that a cemetery?"

It was. And almost before the car came to a halt after creeping like an oversize beetle through the stream-bed, both men were out of it. Down the road a hundred yards or so, a woman with a basket on her head turned to watch as they hurried in among the gravestones. Then with a swirl of her red skirt she continued her march down the road--toward the village--at a faster pace.

It was only a small graveyard. Maybe twenty-five markers, all the same rectangular shape, all of stone, all with the same kind of crude lettering which on some was weathered away. Walser and Case stayed together, though neither voiced a reason. Together they found the stone.

Just another rectangle, tipped backward and to one side a little. With only the words AMBROZ BIRZ on it, as stated by the reader of Weird Tales in his letter to that august periodical's editor.

The two stared at it in awe. "I wonder," Case finally said, "if How-

ard and Cave stood here before us."

"And if they did, where are they now?" Sam Walser added.

Case's face had taken on a lean, determined look. "We're going to find that out, Sam. And we're going to find out if Ambroz Birz and Ambrose Bierce are one and the same. You ready?"

"Let's get some pictures of this stone for Mr. Wright," said Sam, "and then have at it."

He went to the car for a Kodak they had brought along. They took pictures--some of Case standing by the grave, some of Walser doing the same, some of the stone by itself. Back in the car they removed the exposed film with care and stored it for safe keeping with the camping equipment they had brought along. Then, with Case humming melodies from a Gustav Mahler symphony while he drove, they continued on down the road.

It wasn't much, the village. A few wooden houses lined the unpaved road. A few stores. An open-air marketplace. As Case aimed the Essex at what appeared to be the community's only cantina, Sam Walser offered a suggestion. "Maybe we ought to see if there's a place here that takes in overnight guests, Justin. I mean, camping out might not be such a good idea. Remember those characters we asked directions of back there."

"I remember them, Sam."

"I'd rather camp out, you understand. And we've got the food and all. But if those fellows are bandidos or bandoleros as your song calls such folk, and they take a notion to pay us a visit . . ."

"Right. A boarding house it is, if there is one."

As they approached the cantina a woman with a basket on her head came out of it, saw them coming, and stopped to stare at them before going on about her business. "Sam," said Case with a frown, "isn't that

the lady who watched us go into the cemetery?"

"Unless red skirts are the in thing here, Justin."

"Then I've a hunch we're expected here. 'Hey, amigos, I just saw a couple of gringo strangers snooping in our graveyard. Better keep an eye peeled for them. Their car was headed this way.'"

"Play it honest," advised Walser. "We more or less have to, anyway, if we want any information. 'Cemetery? That's why we're here, amigos --to check on that Ambroz Birz stone in your cemetery. We think he might have been a famous American writer. We're writers, too. Can anyone help us, maybe?'"

"Right now," Case grumbled, "my number one question is, 'Can we get a cold beer here, amigos?' Let's go find out before my tongue dries up and drops off."

Leaving the Essex, the two approached the cantina's swinging doors and passed from blazing brilliance into near darkness. A good many of the villagers appeared to have sought shelter there too. There were no gaps in the row of occupied stools at the bar, and only a few vacant chairs at tables.

At one of these tables a bearded old man languidly beckoned. He sat alone. Walser shot a silent question at Case, Case nodded, and the two Americans strolled to the table and sat down.

The bearded one extended a leathery hand. His name was Manuel Atras, he said. "Allow me to welcome you to Mahuaripa, senores."

"Allow us to thank you," said Case. "You speak English, eh?"

"In my younger days I crossed the Rio Grande many times to work in Texas."

A waitress came to the table. Not pretty. Not smiling. Case and Walser asked for beer. She grunted and went to the bar where she relayed their order to a scowling bartender. Every customer in the cantina was by now frankly staring at

the two strangers.

"Amigo," Case said to the bearded oldster, "we've come a long way to ask a few questions here. I'm Justin Case. This is Sam Walser. We come as friends."

"Si, senores."

"There is a certain gravestone in your cemetery that interests us." Case described the stone and explained their interest. "By any chance did you know this Ambroz Birz, senor?"

"I knew him."

The fat waitress brought two unlabeled bottles and went away, still without smiling. All others in the cantina still watched, as though at some unfolding drama that held them enthralled.

"Can you tell us about him?" Sam Walser said.

Manuel Atras turned on his rickety chair and peered around the place as though counting his audience. he turned back to study his questioners and massaged his bearded chin with lean brown fingers. Finally he allowed himself a small grin.

"I am an old man, senores."

Case and Walser exchanged glances and waited.

"An old poor man, senores, and there is much to tell about Senor Birz. However, if you plan to stay here a few days . . ."

"We can stay," Walser said.

"And if you will undertake to keep me supplied with food and drink . . ."

Again Case and Walser swapped glances. Both shrugged in acquiescence.

"Let me suggest a place for you to stay, then," Atras went on. "Because it is important for you to stay where you will be safe. This is bandido country."

Even Case, who had been singing or humming I Am the Bandolero half the morning, managed to feign a look of surprise.

"Ah, yes," Atras assured them. "These hills are infested with ban-

dits. We even have two very beautiful bandidas, known as las mujeres violentas, who operate along the Rio Negro. These hellcats of the Black River, wearing masks and armed with whips and sixguns--can you guess what they do, senores? They strip unwary travelers of their valuables, and if a victim happens to be an appealing young male they strip him of his clothes also and force him to service them at gunpoint."

"You're kidding," said Justin Case.

"I do not joke, senor."

"To service them?"

"In more ways than one, I have heard. It is a game with them, which their victims may enjoy for a time but always end up losing. So--" He spread his leathery hands and smiled across the table at them. "I would suggest you stay at the home of my good friend Senora Forzar and her two daughters, Oretina and Vivia, here in the village. There you will be safe."

"This Senora Forzar takes in strangers?" Sam Walser questioned with a scowl.

"Oh, yes. Prospectors board there often. The senora is not at home at the moment--she left a few weeks ago for who knows where--and the house is in the hands of Oretina. But that will be no problem I assure you."

Thinking he had heard someone in the room softly snicker, Justin Case stopped staring at Manuel Atras and quickly looked around. Every eye in the place was still on the three of them, and, yes, some of the watchers seemed to wear ghosts of smiles. Under the table Case's right knee nudged Sam Walser's left.

"Careful, Sam," the nudge said, "this guy could be setting us up."

Walser moved his knee to signify he understood. "Before we agree to this, amigo, let me ask one more question," he said. "We think two other Americans came here a while ago to look for the grave in ques-

tion. One was named Howard, the other Cave. Did you meet them?"

"I met them and will tell you about them. But not here."

"O.K. Order a bottle of your favorite liquor and we'll go."

Atras summoned the unsmiling waitress and ordered tequila, at which point a number of the cantina's other patrons rose from their stools and chairs and drifted toward the door. Apparently the performance was over, but watching them disappear, Case had a feeling he and Sam Walser were being recruited to act in one of a different kind. On gazing again at the face of Manuel Atras, he noted a glint, a sparkle of something like anticipation, in that one's aloof eyes.

Had the people of Mahuaripa just now used the village drunk as bait in some sort of trap? Some kind of ambush, maybe, which they were now hurrying out to set up? And did Atras know what they were up to?

Walser paid the bill. Atras, his bottle of tequila lovingly tucked under one arm, rose smiling from his chair. For a man well past middle age he seemed remarkably spry as he walked between the Americans to their car and climbed into it.

The house to which he directed Case and Walser stood at the end of the village's main street--its only street--in a kind of ghostly gray loneliness. A wooden structure two storeys high with a long front veranda, it probably was lost in shadow for an hour or two daily when the sun descended behind the brooding mass of El Promontorio a mile or so beyond. Climbing the veranda steps, Atras thumped on the door as though he owned the place.

The door opened. Case took in a breath and Walser's eyes changed shape. The woman standing there, in a black skirt and low-cut embroidered blouse of many bright colors, was a raven-haired beauty. Even though fixed on a frown, her full

red lips were an invitation.

Addressing her in Spanish, Atras introduced his companions. She stopped frowning and offered her hand. "My English he very bad," she murmured, now smiling. "You speak Spanish, senores?"

"About as well as you do English." Walser would have liked to hold that lovely hand longer, but reluctantly let it go. "But yes, a little. We'll manage somehow."

It was to be from then on a little of each. But for the moment, Atras was there to act as go-between.

He arranged for them to share a room on the second floor, and after paying for it in advance they climbed to inspect it. Big, with a high ceiling, it had windows overlooking the road; they could look down at the Essex or out at El Promontorio in the near distance. Atras, having accompanied them, made himself at home in a rocking chair with his bottle. When he casually downed three inches of tequila in one long swig without making a face, Case and Walser exchanged looks of surprise mingled with new respect.

The Mexican wiped his mouth on the back of his hand. "Now, senores, I think we should go to the cave."

"The what?" said Walser, lifting an eyebrow.

"There is a cave in the mountains over there." Atras jerked a thumb toward the window in which El Promontorio was the dominant piece of scenery. "It is there that your Ambroz Birz died. Also, I took Senores Howard and Cave there. We can talk about all this when we get there."

Again Walser and Case swapped looks. On the long journey from Chicago they had developed a rapport that now amounted to a kind of ESP. Case said, "You want us to go now, senor? Right now? Good Lord, I'm just about beat."

"Yeah." Walser inhaled a big breath to demonstrate how much more durable he was. "We'd better let

Justin rest here awhile, Manuel. I'll go with you. We can come back for him later."

Obviously not pleased, Atras rose from his chair and peered at Case, but there was little any man could tell from that owl's face and scarecrow body, especially after days of travel over oven-hot, dusty roads. The old man tipped the bottle to his mouth again, wiped his lips and heard again, grunted, then shrugged. "All right." He looked at Walser and jerked a thumb toward the door. "But you and I, Senor Walser, must go at once, to reach the cave before dark."

"You'll be all right here, Justin?" Walser said with a frown.

"Should be, Sam. I'll have the senorita for company."

"Yeah, sure." Though he himself had suggested the arrangement, Walser did not look happy.

"Be careful, Sam," Case warned.

"And you, old buddy. Just remember, Poe and Bierce were sometimes published in very pretty covers." With that, big Sam Walser hitched up his belt and followed the village drunk--if Manuel Atras really was the village drunk--out of the room.

It was late in the afternoon by the time Walser, following where the strange old man led, had traversed the winding path through the foothills that led to El Promontorio. Now the oddly contrasted pair stood before the gaping black maw of the cave Atras had spoken of, a single dark cavity in the mountainside's rocky expanse.

"It was in here," Atras began, adopting a dramatic tone, "that the one called Ambroz Birz ended his days. Come, my friend, let us enter." The old one beckoned with a claw-like hand, his toothless grin arousing Walser's suspicions.

As the big American passed from the afternoon's golden sunlight into the cavern's stygian gloom, he found himself temporarily blind as a bat.

As his eyesight gradually readjusted to the cave's shadowy recesses, Walser's other senses remained alert to any treacherous move the old man might be capable of.

Atras struck a match and ignited an oil lamp that had been placed in the cave. The unsteady light cast wavering shadows over the cavern walls, and Walser gasped in astonishment.

The chamber they were in had been enlarged artificially, and the walls were covered with bizarre carvings. Friezes characterized the religious observances of a long-vanished people. And while the artistic workmanship denoted an advanced civilization, the scenes depicted were testament to a savage bloodthirstiness unsurpassed and rarely equalled in the annals of human depravity.

Some of the friezes portrayed grisly human sacrifices, in which still-beating hearts were torn from the breasts of victims bound to blood-stained altars. Other scenes showed children being flayed alive, or men in priestly garb feasting on corpses. Walser studied these scenes and others just as nightmarish in morbid fascination, until his reverie was broken by shrill laughter that raised his hackles.

"A grim people, were they not?" cackled Manuel Atras. "Some of their blood flows in my veins. They were the ancient Aztec Indians!"

Walser nodded. He had recognized the carvings as Aztec as soon as he had seen them, though he'd been a bit surprised to find their relics this far north. The big man had acquired a smattering of archeological knowledge during travels in Central America. He even knew that the deity honored by the loathsome rites depicted about him was Xipe, God of the Seedling.

Atras motioned Walser to a carved stone seat and lit some more lanterns. Then the old Mexican sat cross-legged on the cavern floor

and told how the man who may have been Ambrose Bierce came to perish in this chamber of horrors:

"It was over twenty years ago that I first saw the man Ambroz Birz. He came into the village with some of Villa's men. An old man he was, senor, tired-looking and all wasted away, like a living skeleton, no? Only with a beard and long white hair. The men he was with were on the run from the federales, and looking for a place to hide in the mountains.

"I told them of this cave, but the foolish villagers warned them away, saying it was a bad place. The one called Birz asked to see the cave, and so I brought him here. Now, as you can see, there are tunnels that lead away from this chamber. Some reach to the very heart of the mountain. Against my warning, Birz insisted on exploring the deepest of these. He soon became lost, and was not seen again for many days.

"When he finally found his way back to this chamber, he was crawling on his hands and knees, near to death. When I found him he was unable to speak, and before an hour had passed he was no more."

Concluding his tale, Atras withdrew something from a niche in the wall. "This is something he found, deep in the caves. He clutched it in his death-grip. Unusual, is it not?"

Walser examined the strange object Atras placed before him. It was some sort of musical instrument, a set of pipes not unlike those played by the great god Pan in the Greek myths. But certain similarities to other pre-Colombian artifacts Walser had seen indicated that it was definitely of Aztec origin.

"And you say this was found in a cave somewhere below this?" Walser queried.

"Si, si, senor. If you wish to explore further, I will be happy to guide you. I know my way around by now, but you, I fear, would soon

become lost like our poor dead friend Who knows? Perhaps hunger and thirst alone did not cause his death. Perhaps these pipes were not the only discovery he made . . ."

Again Atras' shrill laughter echoed through the cavern. He slipped the curious "pan pipes" into a pocket and added, "Still, many more interesting carvings and artifacts await the bold explorer." So saying, the old man picked up two of the lanterns and proffered one to Walser.

"You lead the way," the American said tersely.

The pair descended through a labyrinth of caves and tunnels, some natural, some man-made. El Promontorio must be honeycombed with them, thought Walser. More of the loathsome carvings were in evidence. In a chamber adjoining one tunnel, Walser glimpsed crudely made furniture, bedding, and some canned provisions. Could this be Manuel Atras' home?

The big man had already decided that Atras was crazy, but, as far as he was concerned, harmless. If Atras had accomplices they would have shown themselves by this time, and on his own the wizened old Mexican offered little danger to a man of Walser's physique.

At a fork in one of the tunnels, Atras suggested the pair split up. "I am certain the two branches connect up a little further on," he said. "Fear not. Stay within the sound of my voice . . ."

Before Walser could object, Atras started off down one of the branches. Walser stepped into the other tunnel and, playing the lantern light about, was able to discern that it came to a dead end about thirty feet away. He was about to turn and go back when an enormous stone panel slid down into the passageway behind him with a deafening crash, cutting off his only avenue of escape.

Trapped like a rat in a rain bar-

rel, big Sam Walser fought down the urge to panic. He strained against the panel in futile desperation, realizing even as he did so that the stone slab weighed many tons, and the exertions of a dozen men would not budge it. Getting a grip on himself, he sought about the tunnel for some hidden mechanism to raise the panel. If there was one, it was too cleverly concealed for him to discover.

"Atras!" the big man yelled through a narrow slit in the panel, "what the hell is this? Get me out of here!"

The only reply was the shrill cackle of Atras' mocking laughter. Peering through the slit, Walser could see the Mexican gibbering and capering about in the shadows like some lunatic.

Walser clenched his fists as he fumed helplessly over his predicament. He was granted a glimmer of hope a second later when he heard the grinding of stone against stone. To his astonishment, the seemingly solid stone wall at the other end of the tunnel slid open to reveal a large chamber beyond.

No doubt that chamber contained a nest of rattlesnakes, Walser thought, or a rabid mountain lion, or some other horror placed there by the madman who held him prisoner. But, having nowhere else to go, the big man stepped warily into the chamber.

The stone room's occupant was not at all what Walser expected, however. When he crossed the threshold, thinking himself ready for anything, he caught his breath when he found himself face-to-face with a ravishingly beautiful young woman!

For a second, Walser stared at the woman in mute amazement. Something about her raven tresses and full red lips seemed hauntingly familiar. Playing a hunch, he inquired, "Vivia Forzar?"

"Sil" A rapid-fire burst of Spanish erupted from those luscious lips,

the verbal barrage unintelligible to the American. Walser gestured for silence and carefully explained that his command of the language was less than fluent. As before, with Oretina, they would have to use both their languages and help each other over the rough spots.

When Vivia had calmed down, they quickly determined that they were both Atras' prisoners. Vivia had been imprisoned in the chamber for a number of days, and had explored every inch of it. She had found no means of escape in that time. A shaft in the ceiling high above, beyond their reach, admitted fresh air and daylight. The latter was fading fast, and Walser was glad he had the lantern.

After explaining who he was and why he had come to Mahuaripa, Walser asked, "Just who is Atras, anyway? What's his game?"

Vivia explained that Manuel Atras was a feeble-minded reprobate that the villagers used to laugh at and make fun of. He was generally regarded as a harmless nuisance who annoyed people by playing those weird pipes of his all day. Their attitude changed, however, when their daughters began to flock around him to hear him play. The girls' elders then forbade him to go near the old man, and Vivia had been shocked sometime later when one of her friends confided that she had made love to the old man and found him "sexy as hell."

Walser suspected that the Aztec pipes must have some hypnotic effect on the weak-willed, and an aphrodisiac effect on certain women. His suspicions were borne out as Vivia continued her tale.

Atras continued to use the pipes to seduce the women of Mahuaripa, taking care to do so discreetly. Over the years he mastered the pipes, and his power over the women increased. He became bolder, and used the magic pipes, not only to seduce women, but to compel people to do

his bidding in other ways as well. In time he threatened to undermine the authority of Vivia's mother...

At this point Walser interrupted, "Wait a minute. You mean your mother runs Mahuaripa?"

"Si," the girl replied, "she is like mayor and sheriff both. Years ago she rode with Emiliano Zapata and the great bandit chief Pancho Villa. No man is faster with a six-gun. She taught Oretina and myself to shoot as soon as we were big enough to hold a gun. My sister and I are a match for any of the other bandits along the Rio Negro."

"Other bandits?"

Vivia smiled mischievously, despite the seriousness of their predicament. "It was Oretina's idea. Too many of Mama's stories, perhaps. At times my sister and I..." She lapsed into an embarrassed silence.

"Don't tell me. You two would dress up like lady bandits and force handsome young gringos to service you at gunpoint."

"Very well, senor," Vivia said coyly, "I won't tell you."

Taking up the original subject, Walser asked, "What about those pipes Atras plays? It's hard to believe they could make a person do anything."

"That is because you have never heard the music of the pipes. When the music is played, colors appear before your eyes. After a while, nothing matters but the music. There are those in Mahuaripa who beg to hear the music of Manuel Atras."

Walser recalled Case mentioning, during the long drive from Chicago, the fact that various musical tones suggested certain colors to some people. He wondered if Atras' weird pipes touched some latent faculty of the brain. Perhaps the Aztec priests had originally used the pipes to induce a state of religious mania in their victims, causing them to surrender willingly to their own gory sacrifice. And maybe both they and Atras had the help of a little

peyote.

At length, Walser said, "I'd still like to know exactly what the hell Atras has planned for you and me."

Hearing this, Vivia grew fearful. She told Walser that so many of the villagers were addicted to Atras' music that he had a small army of slaves, so blindly obedient that they would kill and die for him. Otherwise Vivia's mother would have ousted him from the Rio Negro region long ago. For some reason, though, he never appropriated the homes and possessions of those in thrall to him. Instead he dwelt alone in the cave, and rumor had it that he sometimes had women brought to him, and these were never seen again . . .

"How did Atras get his hands on you?" Walser asked.

Vivia was visibly shaken by the question and seemed on the verge of tears. "That is the most horrible part of all, kind senor. I learned, too late, that Oretina, my own sister, had become Atras' slave. She brought me here and imprisoned me by trickery."

"My God!" exclaimed Walser. "My friend Justin Case is with Oretina right now! I've got to get out of here and get back to him somehow."

Walser and the girl searched in vain for some hidden mechanism that might move the stone slab that held them prisoner. Finding none, Walser hit on another plan. Perhaps Vivia could reach the shaft in the ceiling above if she stood on Walser's shoulders. It was worth a try.

Balancing on the big man's shoulders, Vivia discovered that the shaft that led to the outside world was within reach, but too narrow for her to crawl through. Walser lowered her to the floor once more, but before they could discuss their next move, they were struck dumb by strains of an unearthly music that drifted in from outside.

In the chamber beyond, Manuel Atras had begun to play those dev-

ilish pipes. The piping had a weird, arresting quality, unlike any music Walser had ever heard. He marveled that so simple an instrument could produce such tones. It was as though he were listening to the soft moan of desert winds, or the whisper of black waves lapping at some desolate antarctic beach.

If Walser was fascinated by the music, Vivia seemed totally entranced. Her eyes were wide and glazed; her breathing became heavy. Walser could not help but notice how her ample bosom rose and fell in time to the blasphemous piping. The blood rushing to her face made her even more beautiful. Then Walser gasped as Vivia's voluptuous body began to sway in cadence to Atras' tune, like a cobra before a fakir.

Walser grabbed the girl to shake her free from the trance. But when he touched the bare flesh of her perfectly molded arms, a delightful shock of ecstasy jolted him. Every nerve in his body seemed rubbed raw; he shuddered with pleasure as Vivia embraced him, her delicate hands roaming freely over him. Walser's senses were more acute than ever before, and his head reeled as the musky aroma of Vivia's body entered his nostrils.

All possible danger now forgotten, Walser stripped away Vivia's colorful blouse and flowing skirt, even as she fumbled with his belt. Her full, red lips sought Walser's hungrily...

Some time later, after the music had stopped, Walser shook his head to clear it. He gathered his discarded garments and, groping for an apology, muttered, "I'm sorry... never should have... taken advantage of the situation..."

The girl cut him off. "Don't be sorry, Sam," she said, "I'm not. Not about us, anyway. But when I think of that filthy old man and how he manipulated us . . ."

Vivia's eyes flared with the sudden anger of the fiery Latin as

she cursed Atras in Spanish. Then, just as abruptly, her fury gave way to despair. "Oh, Sam," she sighed, "will we never escape this monster?"

Walser placed a soothing arm about the girl's shoulders. "Sure we will. Maybe you can use my jackknife to chip away at the shaft in the ceiling and make it big enough to squeeze through. Granted it won't be easy, balancing on my shoulders the whole time, but we can do it if Atras stays away long enough. Rest a bit, and then we'll get started."

Vivia nestled close, and Walser lapsed into silence. He was reluctant to talk about Atras' music and the effect it had had on him. He knew that Atras had not been able to slip any drugs into his beer at the cantina earlier. The music of the pipes had been the sole cause of the spell he had fallen under. He had even glimpsed the colors Vivia had spoken of . . .

"The colors were so vivid this time," the girl murmured, as if sharing his thoughts, "when, on occasion, I heard the old man play, I would see them, a little bit. But now they were so bright, almost alive. If they were any more intense, I would lose my will completely, like my poor sister."

"If only I could blot out those colors--not see them somehow. Then Atras could control me no more. This I know. I feel it inside me."

Walser nodded and stroked her silky hair. He was worried about his friend. Justin Case was alone with Oretina, totally unaware that she was Atras' pawn in a diabolical conspiracy. And here Walser sat, the madman's prisoner, unable to help Justin or even warn him. . .

A gentle rapping on the door of his second-floor room aroused Justin Case from a pleasant state of not-quite-sleep. He had not meant to doze off. Tired from the day's assorted activities, especially from struggling with Sam Walser to keep the balky Essex running, he had stretched out on the bed just to

ease the aches in his scarecrow frame. Scowling at the closed door now, he reluctantly sat up.

"Yes?"

"Senor? It is Oretina."

Oretina? Who . . .? Oh, yes. He and Sam had rented this room in a boarding house or whatever one ought to call it, in the Mexican mountain village of Mahuaripa. The house was run by a woman named Forzar and her two daughters, Oretina and Vivia. But the mother and Vivia were absent at the moment, and he, Justin Case, was alone with Oretina. H'm.

The lovely Oretina, with her red, red lips, promising black eyes, and a figure beautiful beyond description. H'm.

Case decided he was not so tired, after all. "Hey, come on in!"

The door opened. The young woman with the red lips and promising black eyes and the figure beautiful beyond description came into the room and stood before him, smiling, with her hands on her hips.

"What can I do for you?" Case asked, hoping he already knew.

She drew up a small, straight-backed chair and sat on it, facing him. "Senor, I think we should talk a little about the man who brought you here."

"Atras?" Case frowned. "Well, sure. Sam Walser and I have a feeling--"

"That he is not what he seems to be? That he is--how do you say it in English?--up to something suspicious--suspicious--suspicious?"

"Well, senorita, it did cross our minds."

"But you are wrong." Rising, she came closer and stood before him as he slouched on the edge of the bed. One lovely hand reached out to lie like a warm feather on his left shoulder. "He is just a simple old man, senor. A nice old man who makes music."

"Music?"

"He plays an old, old instrument--a set of pipes--that he found many years ago. And the music he makes is heavenly. Everyone loves it. Ev-

everyone loves him. So, you see, when I sensed that you and your friend felt you should perhaps not trust him, I had to come and tell you."

She leaned closer. Her black eyes gazed into his and her soft, full lips reassuringly smiled at him. "You see, senor?"

Thinking he did, Case attempted to slide an arm around her waist. But somehow she managed to be just out of reach without seeming to move very much.

"Would you like a drink, senor?" she murmured. "If we are going to be friends?"

"Why not?"

"I will get us one. And while I am gone, perhaps you will think about what I have told you . . . how Manuel Atras is really a loving and wonderful man."

Which if you but knew it, Case thought, is not what you are telling me at all, is it? What you're actually doing, pretty lady--though of course you don't know it--is putting me on my guard.

And what, he wondered, was Sam Walser doing with that "loving and wonderful" old man at the moment?

Case waited. He had removed his shirt before stretching out on the bed. Now he thought about putting it back on but decided not to. He even peeled his undershirt off. After all, the house was a little warm. Not much, perhaps, but a little. With his hands clasped behind his head, he lay back and fixed his gaze on the open doorway, awaiting Oretina's return. His heart beat a little bit faster as he did so.

Suddenly, there she was in the doorway, with a tray in her hands. And she had changed her clothes.

Before, she had worn an embroidered white blouse and a gray skirt. Now she had on a diaphanous black robe adorned with bits of silvery trim in certain interesting places. In the room's dim light he could not tell what she wore under the robe. Perhaps nothing?

She smelled nice, too. It was a perfume, of course, but no kind he had ever before encountered. Hypnotic, sort of.

On the tray, which appeared to be of wood and was lacquered bright red, were two tall glasses filled with a white liquid.

"I have brought us some tequila." The smile on those lovely lips was, without question, an invitation in more ways than one. "We make it ourselves here." Lifting a glass from the tray, she handed it to him.

There was a small table beside the bed. "Come here," Case said, and put both glasses on it, aware that she watched intently as he did so. Then he reached again, this time for Oretina herself. As before.

"You would not like to drink first?" she protested.

"I would not like to drink first, querida. Drinking takes a man's mind off what he is doing. Come!"

Apparently she was not too happy with the arrangement, but with a small sigh of reproach she allowed herself to be coaxed into his embrace. He drew her down beside him with his body between hers and the table on which the drinks stood. And in no time at all he discovered he had been right about what was--or rather was not--under the filmy black robe.

An old hand at this sort of thing, Case soon had her purring against him with her head on his shoulder, her eyes closed, her raven hair spilling down over her face in such a way that even had she opened her eyes she still would not have been able to see what his free hand was doing.

What it did was reach out to the bedside table and deftly switch the two glasses. After which he felt safe in emptying his mind of all anxieties and emulating the behavior of certain characters he was rather well known for writing about.

After all, writers ought to seek first-hand experience in what they

wrote about, no? How else could they be convincing?

A good half hour passed--a very good half hour--before Oretina at last murmured a sigh of contentment. "Shall we have some tequila now, my darling?"

Reaching for his clothes, Case lazily put them on, telling himself that in a situation such as this one never knew what might happen next and should always be prepared. A drink of tequila--unspiked, of course--would be just the thing now, he decided. He was reminded of certain billboards advertising a beverage called Dragon Stout on the island of Jamaica. Usually depicting an attractive young couple on a Jamaican beach, looking somewhat limp and languid after a session on the sand, the ads coyly advised that "DRAGON PUTS IT BACK!"

But on turning to reach for his glass of tequila, he saw that his lovely companion, still in a state of delicious undress, was already tipping it to her lips!

With a smile she handed him the other one.

Case took it and scowled at it. He lifted his gaze to scowl at her. "I don't think I want this."

"What, senor?"

"No me gusta. I don't really like the stuff."

"And you are very wise not to like it, senor," purred a voice from the doorway. "Unless you wish to try our mountain drugs!"

With an explosive gasp Oretina dropped both glasses and jerked herself around to face the door. Case turned with her. In the doorway, hands on hips, stood a woman who looked enough like Case's bedmate to be her mother. Not quite so tall, perhaps--certainly not so undressed--but with the same handsome features, flashing dark eyes and raven hair.

For a Mexican peasant woman she was oddly dressed, though. A red silk shirt sheathed her shapely bos-

om. Wide-legged pants of black leather half hid the carved, high-heeled boots she wore. The pants swished as she strode briskly into the room, followed by a small army of scowling men.

With a sixgun straight out of a Hollywood western the woman motioned Case away from the bed. "Stand over there, senor." Her voice was low but firm. Her gaze remained fixed on Oretina.

Case silently obeyed, with a glance at her followers. They too had sixguns--in holsters at their belts, with their hands hovering over them. Bands of such men had prowled these mountains in the lively days of Villa and Zapata, Case thought. And perhaps Ambrose Bierce, that great writer of weird tales, had tagged along with one such group in search of story material or as a believer in the cause. Staring at the woman in frank admiration, Case wondered what the past half hour might have been like had she, instead of her daughter, been his playmate.

Standing against the wall, he watched now in silence while mother confronted daughter. The conversation that followed was in Spanish, but he understood enough of it.

"So!" Senora Forzar's greeting cracked like a whip, and Oretina jerked back as though struck across the face by it. "So! He has enslaved you now!"

"What--what are you talking about, Mama?"

"You know what I am talking about! I speak of that wicked monster who enslaves people with his devil-music! That Manuel Atras! That beast in human form who commands that women be brought to him for his amusement!" The senora took another step forward, and the muzzle of her sixgun ended its twitching ascent only inches from Oretina's eyes. "And you, you awful creature! You have taken him your own sweet sister to be his plaything!"

"No, Mama--no, no!" Cringing naked on the bed, Oretina turned her head away from her mother's wrath and covered her face with hands now violently quaking.

"Do you deny it, wretch?"

"I--I had--I had to, Mama. I had to do it! He made me!"

"How did he make you?"

"With the music," Oretina sobbed. "With his ancient, terrible music, Mama. It makes you want to obey him, even when part of you knows your soul will go to hell for doing so. Mama, please--please--I didn't want to take my sister to him. I love my sister. But the music--the colors you see when you hear it--"

"Get up!" Senora Forzar lowered her gun but leaned forward to slap her daughter's face, and the sound was as crisp and loud as any gunshot. Even her followers, until then watching in silence, gasped as though struck by their leader's savage hand.

"Mama--please--"

"Get up! Cover your nakedness. Do you think we are still playing bandita games with harmless wayfarers, to amuse ourselves?" Whirling on one foot, the senora faced her followers. "You men! Guard the gringo here while I escort this slut to her room for some clothing!"

Mother and daughter departed, the older woman angrily prodding the naked younger one ahead of her and continuing her harangue as they went. Justin Case heard the words, "Where is he, this monster you adore so much?" and the daughter's whimpered reply, "No, Mama, no! I cannot betray him! If I do, he--"

Anything else Case might have overheard was blocked out by the senora's followers, who by then had advanced and were standing like a wall in front of him. Restless hands on sixguns eloquently warned him not to try any stupid heroics.

He shrugged. "Okay, amigos. I want to find the guy as much as you do. Right now my buddy Sam Walser is with him, innocent as a lamb and maybe about to be slaughtered."

They understood no English, it seemed. Perhaps thinking the remark some kind of insult, one lunged forward and thrust his bearded face into Case's, snarling in Spanish, "Quiet, dog!"

Case was carefully quiet.

Oretina was no longer naked when the woman returned. Like her mother she wore boots, black pants, a red shirt. Perhaps this was the costume all three ladies of this weird household had affected when, as old Manuel Atras had explained in the cantina, they had operated along the Black River as sixgun hellcats, forcing handsome young males to service them at gunpoint.

"Come!" Mama snapped at her followers. "My daughter has consented to show us where the color-music man is to be found." A stabbing glance at Oretina made that one cringe. "have you not, my darling?"

"If--if you insist, Mama. But I warn you--"

"So come! You too, gringo. We depart!"

It was a strange journey. A reluctant and frightened Oretina led the single-file procession. Senora Forzar closely followed her weapon aimed at the middle of her daughter's back. After her trudged Case, restrained by the need for caution when by nature he would have rushed blindly on to aid a pal in peril. And behind Case, in single file, strode the motley band of Mexicans who could just as easily have been following a Pancho Villa many years before, alert for an ambush by government troops.

From the village they trudged through deepening shadows into the foothills, and through those toward the cliffside mouth of the underworld into which, earlier, Manuel Atras had led the unsuspecting Sam Walser. Would they get there too late? Despite the chill of approaching night, Case was sweating with anxiety as the entrance to the cave came in sight above them.

Suddenly at that black hole in the cliff there was a flurry of motion. The very rocks seemed to move and a volley of shots filled the dusk with thunder. The daughter of Senora Forzar flung herself from the trail with a wild cry.

A cry of what? Fear or triumph?

Justin Case threw himself sideways too. Not with a yell but with the desperate hope of staying alive to write a few more stirring tales of adventure. Scrambling for cover, Case was deafened by the staccato report of more shots and the whine of ricocheting bullets.

As the echo of the gunshots died away, Case peered about cautiously. The bandits had also taken cover behind the boulders at the side of the steep mountain trail. Senora Forzar had grabbed Oretina and jerked her down behind some rocks, and now she and the others returned fire, driving back the ambushers who had lurked near the mouth of the cave.

The Senora and her crack marksmen dropped several of the ambushers. The others were forced to take refuge behind rocks strewn about the cave's entrance. When both sides were firmly entrenched behind suitable cover, they ceased to waste ammunition except for an occasional potshot.

Case recognized some of the ambushers as patrons of the cantina earlier that day. Then what he had gathered from Senora Forzar's conversation was true--Manuel Atras had the people of Mahuaripa under some sort of spell, and she had had to leave to enlist old comrades-in-arms to help free the town from the old man's malign power.

Assessing the situation, Case realized that they were at something of a standoff. The Senora had lost no men, while several of the enemy had fallen; Case estimated that the forces of each side now numbered about a dozen. Though the ambushers were inferior marksmen and had lost the element of surprise, they

still held the high ground. The bandits were pinned down, unable to advance or retreat--enough daylight remained for their foes to pick them off should they emerge from cover.

Long minutes dragged by as the shadows deepened. At length the Senora whispered something to her men, and one by one they crept away, keeping low among the rocks. Case discerned their plan. A large outcropping of rock ran along the side of the cliff; using it for cover the bandits could scale the cliff and come at the ambushers from above and behind. It would be tough work and slow going, but they would be safe from enemy bullets.

Senora Forzar tossed a rifle and ammunition belt to Case. Then she and the one large bandit who remained behind with her trained their weapons on the enemy position. The Senora gestured for Case to do likewise. Soon the bandits would have the ambushers surrounded. In the meantime there was no place for the enemy to retreat but into the cave itself. To do so, they would have to leave the shelter of the rocks. As soon as they did, Senora Forzar, the bandit at her side, and Justin Case could pick them off in rapid fire.

Case noticed that though Oretina now seemed cowed and cooperative, the Senora wisely kept the weapons out of her reach. Such was the evil influence of Manuel Atras that Senora Forzar trusted the gringo stranger with a rifle, but not her own daughter.

Scanning the side of the cliff, Case noted the bandits' progress. Any minute they would be able to surround the ambushers. If Atras' servants were going to make a break for it, it would have to be soon. Case looked back to their position, his rifle at the ready.

Suddenly, Case and the others were startled by new sounds in the twilight stillness. First, the striking of a match. Then, a sputter

followed by an ominous hiss. Split-seconds later, an explosion louder than any thunder hammered their eardrums. They looked on in helpless horror as the outcropping to which the bandits clung was blown clear from the face of the cliff. The broken bodies of the bandits were hurled from the mountainside amidst huge shards of rock. Flung outward with hurricane force, they tumbled end over end as they plummeted into the abyss.

Senora Forzar's shouted curses were lost in the echo of the explosion. At the mouth of the cave, one of their enemies emerged from the shadows brandishing several sticks of dynamite, tied together and lit, that he meant to hurl into the midsts of Case and his companions. This proved to be the ambushers' undoing. The tears of sheer fury that welled in her eyes did not hinder the Senora's aim as she squeezed off a single shot from her sixgun. It struck its target squarely in the chest, and the man pitched backwards still clutching the dynamite.

The Senora smiled grimly as frantic cries of alarm sprang up among the hidden ambushers. Then a second explosion rocked the mountainside and echoed off into the surrounding canyons. Case and the others huddled behind the boulders as fragments of rock, earth, and enemy bodies rained down on them.

When the dust and smoke had cleared, Senora Forzar, Justin Case and the sole surviving bandit picked up their weapons and, with Oretina to guide them, made their way through the rubble and into the cave.

Within the cavern, more lanterns had been lit and torches had been placed within the tunnels, but of Atras there was no sign. "Hiding like the cowardly rat he is," the Senora remarked curtly. She crossed herself when she glimpsed the blasphemous carvings on the chamber's

walls, displaying apprehension for the first time.

Case took up one of the lanterns and the Senora prodded Oretina with the muzzle of her pistol. "Take us to your sister," the older woman commanded. Oretina meekly obeyed, and led them into the labyrinth of tunnels.

Case was anxious to get moving. He felt certain that Sam Walser, if he still lived, was imprisoned somewhere near Vivia Forzar. And while he still did not entirely trust Oretina, he noticed that she seemed different now. She looked feverish and jittery, like a dope addict going through withdrawal. He doubted she was capable of any more tricks.

Oretina guided them through the tunnels, the trail ending in what appeared to be a cul-de-sac. Senora Forzar grew angry and pulled back her open hand to strike the girl, but Oretina backed away sheepishly and revealed a lever concealed in the wall. With a pull of the lever, the wall that cut them off slid away, revealing a large chamber beyond.

Justin Case could not help but chuckle at the sight that greeted him. Inside the chamber a beautiful girl, Vivia Forzar obviously, was doing some sort of balancing act on the broad shoulders of big Sam Walser. The girl appeared to be using a knife to enlarge an air-shaft in the ceiling. At the sight of the rescuers, however, Walser lowered the girl and together they rushed to greet the newcomers.

After some quick introductions, the six began to re-traverse the shadowy corridors. Vivia seemed to bear the penitent Oretina no ill will. As for their mother, the Senora seemed anxious to leave these caverns and their unholy carvings now that Vivia had been found. "Manuel Atras can be made to answer for his crimes later," she explained, "now that his slaves are no more." Case filled Walser in on how Atras' followers had been blown to bits.

Neither Case nor Walser entirely trusted Oretina to lead them safely through that underground maze built by the Aztecs so long ago, but the men knew they had no choice. Both breathed audible sighs of relief when the cavern mouth, and the night sky beyond, came into view.

So that was that, Case thought; they had rescued Sam Walser and Vivian, Atras' zombies had all been destroyed, and the evil old man himself dared not show his face. Without his slaves to protect him, Atras could be shot like a rattlesnake the next time he was foolish enough to reveal himself. Not bad for a day's work.

It was then that relief was suddenly replaced by fresh horror. The sextet was less than ten short yards from freedom when the world fell away beneath their feet, plummeting them into a cold, lightless abyss. Cries of confused panic were cut short as they landed harmlessly on some sort of steep incline and began to roll down backwards into the black bowels of the earth.

Case could see nothing now, and his clutching fingers could find no handhold to check his descent. Sorting through the impressions of the last few seconds, his dazed brain told him that the seemingly solid stone floor on which they had trod had actually concealed a large trapdoor. It had opened and closed so suddenly that the very earth seemed to swallow them up, and now Case, Walser, and the others tumbled helplessly down a spiraling chute with sides smooth as polished glass.

Then, abruptly, there was light once more as the chute deposited them all on a bed of straw heaped in a chamber similar to that which had previously imprisoned Walser and Vivian. Walser noted that he and the others had sustained no injuries other than bruises, but was chagrined at finding himself a prisoner once more. A small niche in one wall revealed shadowy caverns beyond. From somewhere in those

caverns echoed the shrill, triumphant cackle of fiendish laughter.

"Atras, you lousy skunk!" Walser bellowed through the niche, "I'll wring your scrawny neck if I have to tear these rocks apart with my bare hands to do it!"

"I think not, my friend," came a familiar voice from the dark. "Soon I shall play the pipes once more, and ere long the god Xipe shall have his sacrifice."

Walser recalled grimly that the rites of that Aztec deity included dismemberment and flaying the victims alive. His eyes widened in horror as Atras stepped into the torchlight that illuminated the cavern. The insane old man was now clad only in a loose robe of what Walser strongly suspected was tanned human skin.

Though taken aback for a second, Walser managed to retort, "Guess again, Atras. There are six of us in here, and your flunkies are all dead. Care to come in and try it yourself?"

"Fool!" the old one snapped. "First you will hear the music, then you will see the colors . . . And then . . . then you will fall on each other like rabid rats, and tear each other limb from limb, and pull the skin from your own bones!"

Walser was struck silent. None who had heard the music, and felt its power, could hear those words and remain unshaken. Walser felt himself break out in a cold sweat. The piping began . . .

The effect on the prisoners was immediate. Senora and her bandit companions began to cross themselves frantically and mutter prayers. Oretina's repentant look of shame fell away as the evil touched her once more, filling her with unholy glee.

Vivian also seemed spellbound by the music, but was trying desperately to say something. "The colors..." she gasped. "Without the colors, the music is harmless. If I could block out the colors, the old man's power would be broken. I know it

would."

Justin Case was struck suddenly by an idea. "Sam," he whispered, "stall Atras. Get him talking about something. I have a plan."

Walser's reeling brain groped frantically for some sort of delaying tactic. Desperately, he blurted, "How many innocent people have you killed in this way, you bloody monster?"

The piping trailed off and the wizened old madman chuckled. "More than a man might easily count, senor. Men, women, and children have all bled away their lives on Xipe's altar. Some tore one another to bits, as you soon shall. But others lay paralyzed and helpless as obsidian knives stripped away their feeling flesh or cut the hearts still beating from their breasts . . ."

Walser winced as Atras described further atrocities, but was yet gratified to learn that he had the old man pegged right as a braggart unable to resist the temptation to gloat. He hoped it would buy Case the time he needed. Glancing in his direction, he noticed that Justin was speaking softly to Vivia while passing a shiny coin back and forth before her eyes.

Hypnosis! Of course! Vivia had said that the music could not affect her if the colors could be blotted out. Walser knew that Case possessed some knowledge of mesmerism, hopefully enough to implant a post-hypnotic suggestion in Vivia's mind not to see those colors. Oretina had already fallen under the spell once more, and even now had to be restrained by Senora Forzar. Vivia would be the next to succumb, unless Case's hasty hypnosis proved effective.

Walser only hoped his friend would have enough time, for he could sense that Atras' tirade was nearing its conclusion. The big American suddenly realized that their original mission, discovering what had become of Bob Howard and Hugh Cave, had

been forgotten in the course of the day's weird events.

"And what about the two gringos who came before us? What did you do to them? Walser felt with sickening certainty that his and Case's respective proteges had been done in by the maniac; he only hoped to stall Atras further.

Outside the cell, Atras shook his head sadly. "Those were two who got away, I fear. It was my clever plan to get them drunk and lure them to this place. But those two drank me--me, Manuel Atras!--under the table. When I came to, they had taken their leave of Mahuaripa. You shall be far less fortunate."

With that, Atras took up those diabolical pipes and began to play once more. Case had finished with Vivia, but now there was no time to hypnotize any of the others. Instead, they tore strips from their clothing and stuffed the bits of cloth into their ears. It was only partially effective in blotting out the sinister music. Walser fought down the urge to panic as Vivia's lovely body began to sway in cadence with the madman's tune . . .

Then, suddenly, the music was broken off as a hideous shriek burst from the throat of the evil old man and echoed through the cavern. Peering through the narrow slit, Walser was unable to see what had befallen him. The effects of his music, however, had vanished like a soap bubble. Vivia was now shaking her head clear, and even Oretina had returned to normal.

Mystified yet grateful for their reprieve, the prisoners removed the stuffing from their ears and sought a means of escape. It was Oretina who showed them the way. Familiar with the labyrinth Atras had inherited from the Aztec priests, she was able to locate a hidden mechanism that caused one of the stone walls to slide back, and their way was clear.

Stepping out into the larger cav-

ern, Walser, Case, and the others were greeted by a horrific sight that drew gasps of shock and revulsion from all assembled. On the floor before them, sprawled in a contorted posture that bespoke unimaginable physical agony, lay the thing that had been Manuel Atras.

It was little more than an oozing mass of entrails and bloody sinews twisted about a brittle skeleton, for every inch of skin had been stripped away . . . as if by obsidian knives wielded by Aztec priests!

Oretina buried her face against Case's chest and began to sob. The slender man attempted to soothe her. Vivia was also on the verge of tears.

The devilish pan pipes lay a few inches from the obscenely mutilated carcass. Sam Walser set his booted foot upon them and ground them into splinters. "Atras was playing with powerful forces," he grunted. "I guess his control of those forces slipped for a second, and that's what finished him. If only we knew why."

"I think I can answer that," Justin Case commented as they turned away from Atras' grisly remains. "It may have something to do with post-hypnotic suggestion I planted in Vivia's mind."

"Yes," the girl agreed, "when the music started it was just like before, but as the colors were about to begin, I could suddenly see nothing but an inky field of black."

"As I had suggested while she was under hypnosis," Case broke in.

"Right after that," the girl concluded, "was when we all heard the old man scream."

It took some time for Walser, Case and company to re-traverse the winding corridors under Oretina's guidance, but at length they emerged safely into the cool, star-strewn night.

Walser looked down at the beautiful senorita who clung blissfully to his arm. Smiling, he noticed that her sister, Oretina, had formed

a similar attachment to Justin Case. It was also apparent that Senora Forzar and the burly bandido at her side were more than good friends. The Senora looked on approvingly as her daughters embraced the two gringos.

"Well, Justin," Walser said, "it looks like Howard and Cave made it out of here okay, and we're not doing too bad ourselves. As for Ambroz Birz . . . for all we know, he was just a hoax cooked up by Atras. That old bastard could have suckered a lot of unwary travelers with that one."

"I guess Wright will be disappointed," replied Case. "Hey! Do you think he'd be interested in the story of how we helped the sixgun hellcats of Black River end the curse of Mahuaripa?"

"That's one tale too weird for even old Farnsworth. But why worry about him when our present company promises to be so much more agreeable?"

"Sam, old buddy, I couldn't agree more!"

* * * *

The merciless noonday sun beat down on a tiny Mexican village even smaller and more remote than Mahuaripa. Located about fifty miles southeast of El Promontorio, the village consisted of a single unpaved street lined with a few one- and two-storey buildings constructed mainly of whitewashed adobe.

Heat rose in shimmering waves from the cracked, sunbaked street where two mangy, emaciated dogs stood panting, their brains too addled to seek shade. Aside from a legion of buzzing flies, they were the only life that stirred there. The human inhabitants remained indoors, lying in siesta or seeking refuge from the blistering heat in the dark, somewhat cooler recesses of the village tavern.

Inside the tavern, at a table in the corner, two gringos sat, drinking moodily. Robert E. Howard swore

"Damn! This town's even deader than the last one."

"That's for sure," replied Hugh B. Cave. "I guess the trail of Ambrose Bierce just vanishes into thin air."

"Yeah, unless you believe in the crazy old man in the last place, and his fake tombstone."

Both men laughed shortly and fell silent. They returned to sipping their tequila and tried to ignore a naked child of about three or four who ran back and forth across the packed-earth floor, squealing in Spanish and stopping now and then at the gringos' table to whine a pitiful plea for money.

Raising his head to avoid looking at the child, Hugh Cave's gaze fell on two overweight, slatternly women seated at the bar. The women, apparently sisters, regarded the gringos with interest.

"Haw haw," chuckled Howard. "Got half a peso, Hugh? Here's our big chance. Those are the local whores!"

"Oh, suuuure!" Cave retorted sourly. "Got any penicillin, Bob? Good God, I'll need something stronger than tequila just to stand the sight of those two."

Howard agreed and called for mescal. Behind the bar, a grossly obese older woman, possibly the mother of the two squatting toadlike on the barstools, shifted uneasily due to her great bulk. Brushing a fly from her sweating upper lip, the older woman extended a flabby arm and brought down a bottle of mescal from a shelf. One of the whores

brought the bottle to the gringos. Cave paid ehr and dismissed her with a weary wave of his hand.

After tasting the stuff, Cave said, "I wonder how Wright will react to the bad news . . . that we couldn't locate Bierce's resting place."

"Hopefully old Farnsworth won't be too shaken up," Howard replied. "Well, anyway he owes me money."

"Me too. I wish I could latch onto something that paid better than Weird Tales."

"Ed Price made mention of those new 'spicy' pulps he's been writing for. Says they pay big--two-and-a-half cents a word--and on time."

"No kidding!" Cave contemplated this as he sampled some more mescal. "Could be a future with them."

Elsewhere in the saloon, the naked kid was searchign the pockets of an old man passed out in a puddle of his own vomit.

"Let's drink up and get out of here," said Howard.

"Right," Cave readily agreed. "Besides, I can't wait to get back home and start work on some of those 'spicy' stories. How about you?"

"I don't know. I may get around to it, but those stories are all written in a deft, jaunty style foreign to my natural style."

"Well, at least the sex element is a cinch," observed Cave.

Howard nodded. "You may have something there. Just write up one of your own adventures, altered to fit the plot."



Murder in Silhouette

by Wade Wells

Datchett knocked on the door of Apartment 3-G. It opened cautiously and the face of a woman, oval and droop-lidded, peeped out.

"Somebody named Lita Gordon phoned my agency for a bodyguard," he said.

The door opened. "I'm Lita Gordon. Come in."

She wore the mistiest of negligees--Datchett could see the curved sweep of her hips, the rondure of her breasts, every line and dimple and shadow. Her thatch-thick black hair was square-cut behind and banged in front. He looked her up and down appreciatively as he entered.

In the main room were two more who looked up from a card game. One was a dumpy man, the other a blonde girl, billowy where the brunette was only curvy.

"My husband, Joe Beard," introduced Lita Gordon. "He was top camera for Nonpareil Pictures in Hollywood. This," her voice hardened, "is Judy Tyrone. Lately she--and I--played roles for Nonpareil."

"Any relation to you two?" asked Datchett. "No? Then where does she fit in?"

"I fit in all right," said the blonde. "I'm Joe's partner."

Datchett spoke to Lita Gordon. "Did my boss tell you his terms?"

"Yes. Fifty, in advance." She twitched up the hem of her negligee, fiddled with a stocking-top, then held out some bills. Datchett counted them and put them away.

"Okay. My name's Cole Datchett. What are you doing so far from your movies?"

"Hiding," said Joe Beard.

"From what?"

"Just hiding," smiled Judy Tyrone impudently. "You've been paid, de-

tective. Isn't that enough?"

"No," replied Datchett, "it isn't. He tossed the wad of money on the table and started to go.

"Hey," called Judy Tyrone, hurrying after him. "Stick around, we need you." She smiled placatingly and squeezed his arm against her soft breasts.

"Then you'd better tell me what for."

"All right, if it'll brighten your life," she said, still peace-making. "Ever hear of Sigrid Holgar?"

"The Swedish movie star, the shy, distant one?"

"That's just her ballyhoo," Beard took it up. "One day I carried my camera to her place. I knew she took sunbaths inside the high hedge, and for a gag I sneaked in and stole some shots. They were swell." He grinned meaningly. "Fifteen minutes of the most glamorous woman in the known world, without a stitch on. How'd you like to see them?"

"Fine," said Datchett, "but where does the bodyguard come in?"

"Sit down and find out," urged Lita.

Beard went on. "About a week or so later there was a shakeup and I was out of a job and broke. I sent word to the bosses about that sunbath film. Offered it to them for two hundred thousand."

"And they?"

Bearded handed over a letter. It had a Nonpareil Studios letterhead and bore two typewritten sentences:

We'll pay ten thousand dollars to keep our star from being cheapened. Take it or leave it.

"I left it," Beard said. "Should

I take chicken feed when I could clean up a million showing the thing at stag parties?

"A couple of days later, when we three were talking it over--"

"You three?" repeated the detective. "When did these two dames get it on it?"

"I'm his wife," said Lita. "I was in from the first. Judy declared herself in about the time Joe made Nonpareil his offer."

"Joe needed my help," contributed the blonde, smiling.

"Anyway, the phone rang," resumed Beard. "Lita answered it."

"And it was Nonpareil," added his wife. "They weren't going to pay Joe's price. Told us to send the film in or look out for torpedoes."

Datchett looked at her. "Sure it was Nonpareil?"

"Who else would have known about it?" asked Beard.

"So we lammed away," said Lita, "figuring to lay low till a lawyer or somebody could make a real deal for the picture. We took this apartment yesterday. About an hour ago the phone rang and I answered it." Her lips twitched. "They don't intend to pay off. Their trouble gang followed us--it's going to rub us out tonight."

"Why not call the cops?" asked Datchett.

"And lose the film?" Beard came back. "No, we'll try to stick it out till morning, then get gone."

"If you'll stay with the job, Mr. Datchett," said Lita, smiling her sweetest. She took the money from the table and offered it again. He accepted it silently and counted it once more.

"Aren't you careful?" snickered Judy.

"Very," replied Datchett.

He looked around the room. A floor lamp lighted it. The door to the corridor had a good patent lock. Big windows opened onto an alley, with a fire escape climbing

up to one of them from the ground three stories below. A smaller door led to a closet with a roll-away bed.

"I sleep there," said Judy.

Another door led into a small hallway, from which opened bedroom, kitchenette and bathroom. All rooms had windows but no fire escapes. Lita Gordon followed Datchett on his tour. As they went into the kitchenette she came close--so close that a fold of her negligee rustled against his coat.

"Stick by me," she pleaded earnestly. "There'll be extra dough and--friendship. I'm scared of--" And she looked toward the front room.

"Of Judy Tyrone?" he suggested.

"I don't trust her. She's only interested in half the take on the film." She came a trifle closer. Her body touched his. "Stick by me, will you?"

He did not reply, but started back to the front room. Judy Tyrone and Beard were standing, faces crushed together, the man's hands clutching the girl's fulsome breasts. At Datchett's stop they fell quickly apart. Lita, behind, had not seen.

Datchett addressed the three. "The ways into this place are the door, which can be locked, and the fire escape, which can be watched."

He sat next the fire escape window. It was almost dark outside. Judy began to shuffle the cards on the table and Beard sat opposite her. Lita strolled over to where Datchett sat and peered out of the window.

"Better get back into the room," Datchett warned her. "A gun guy out there could pick you off like an apple from a tree, without being seen."

"Just what I was thinking," she replied. "A man could practically climb up here before we knew he was around. I've got a suggestion."

"Such as what?"

"The only place to watch the window is from outside."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. We can keep the hall door locked and let nobody in or out. Then the only way in would be the fire escape. You could stay in the alley and have the difference on anybody who tried to come up--could shoot him."

"I'll shoot when it's time," said Datchett, "but there's merit in what you say, Lita." He got up, and Lita pulled down the white curtain on the window. "I'm going down," he announced. "Don't let anybody in or out unless you hear my voice."

The lock snapped behind him as he went into the hall. Descending to the street level, he went to the alley, crossed it and found an up-turned barrel to sit on. Idly watching the lighted window of Apartment 3-G, he fumbled for a cigarette. It wouldn't be tough winning his fee, though it might be boresome, he reflected. Maybe these screwy movie folks were only imagining danger. Those phone calls might be the work of a crank. But he had fifty dollars in his pocket. He'd do a night's sentry duty and help them catch a train tomorrow.

He lolled and thought and smoked. His musings drifted chiefly to Lita Gordon, revealed so alluringly in her thin negligee. Half a package of cigarettes later he saw the light in the apartment blink out. He rose quickly, hand on gun. But a moment later the light came on again. Then he saw a silhouette on the curtain--thatch of hair, curvy body--Lita! She twitched the curtain back, raised the sash and crawled out on the fire escape. Coming down, she saw Datchett in the dimness and came toward him.

"I wanted to get down here with you," she whispered. "I'd be safer, I know."

"How about Beard and that blonde?"

"Trying to say they aren't scared, that it's a false alarm."

"What do you think?"

"I think that Nonpareil is full of tough eggs. And those Holgar

pictures are plenty hot. A flash of them would make a fool out of her--ruin her as a star. They'd kill in a minute to stop it." She shivered. "I'm cold."

"No wonder, wearing that cobweb," he said. She smiled in the gloom and came close, snuggling at his side. Surprised but pleased, he put his arm around her.

She gave him a sidelong look. "Do you think there's anything between Judy and Joe?"

He returned the look without answering.

"They used to step out before he married me, worked in pictures together," she told him. "When Judy muscled in--you've guessed she did just that--I wondered if she didn't want something more than just a cut of the hush money. Maybe she's still going for Joe."

"I don't do that kind of detective work," said Datchett.

"What kind of work is this you're doing now?" she asked lightly. Taking his hand from her shoulder, she drew it down and laid it on a swelling breast.

At touch of the tremblign softness a thrill of delight raced through him. Of their own volition his hard arms drew her close. She smiled at him, then let his lips find hers. As his embrace tightened she surged against him with a sudden fierce passion, as if she would weld her body to his. On questioning hand crept to his, drew it through the neck of her wispy garment. His fingers closed on a bare, trembling breast.

"Aren't we too public here?" she whispered shakily. "Look, that little corner, in the shadow--"

Later she sat with her back to the barrel, cuddled in the curve of his arm. "You're sweet," she said. "I was hoping we'd get along--because I want to leave Joe Beard."

"Yeah?" was all he said.

"Yeah. How'd you like to throw in with me on peddling the film? It's worth plenty. You can represent

me to the Nonpareil people while I lie low, and--"

"Nothing doing, baby. I'm not the type."

Her eyes, wandering upward, suddenly focussed, then opened wide in terror.

"Look up there!" she cried.

Against the drawn shade two figures wrestled back and forth. Even as Datchett spun and looked, they fell apart. One, looming large in the center of the shade, was feminine, billowy--Judy Tyrone. She quivered with excitement, her hands lifted to defend herself. The other, thrown back for a moment, charged again. It was tall, ungainly, long-nosed. The two grappled again.

Judy's hands flailed at her assailant. The man's arm flew up, a knife outlined itself, struck down. Judy staggered and collapsed, while the stranger backed out of sight. Even as Datchett charged the fire escape the light went out.

"Please!" Lita was after him, clinging. "Don't leave me alone!"

He whipped out his revolver and shoved it into her hand. "Upstairs, through the house," he crisped. "Catch anybody who tries to come down that way."

She stared at the gun, then scurried through the side door. Datchett scrambled up the fire escape, gained the first landing, the second, almost fell up the third flight to the window.

All was dark inside. He jerked a flashlight from his hip pocket with one hand while the other reached through the open sash and gave the bottom of the shade a quick jerk. As it flew up he stabbed the flash beam into the room. He circled the walls with it, let it linger in each corner in turn, then quartered the floor. The light flicked across a still form on the rug. He bounded in.

A moment later the door burst open. Lita was there. She touched

a button and the ceiling lights went on. "The door was unlocked," she panted. "Somebody got in or out."

In the center of the rug lay Judy Tyrone. The bottom of her robe was tumbled upward, revealing her legs and full-formed thighs. A knife-hilt jutted from her throat, blood trickled to the floor. She was very still. Under her lay the fallen floor lamp, its cord jerked from the socket.

Datchett knelt beside her, grabbed a wrist to feel the pulse, then thrust his hand into her robe to the valley between her bulging breasts. "Dead," he pronounced.

"Dead?" echoed Lita dully. "Where's Joe?"

More blood was spattered on the rug near Judy, spots of it leading like a trail into the hall. Lita followed it, holding Datchett's gun ready. She snapped another switch. The hall and the bathroom beyond both lighted up. Lita screamed and Datchett hurried to her.

"Joe!" she gasped, pointing. The cameraman lay twisted on the tiled floor beside the tub. His nose trickled blood and he moaned as Datchett touched him. The detective turned on a faucet, scooped cold water into the man's face. Beard snorted and opened his eyes.

Lita began to cry and bent to lift his head. Datchett took the gun from her limp hand and poked into bedroom, kitchenette and closet. Nobody was in any of them. He returned to the front room, studying the blonde's body there.

Lita supported Beard as he came in. The man's nose was out of plumb and he was pale.

Datchett was dialing the phone for police headquarters. "Give me Captain Scaife," he told the man who answered. Then, after a moment, "Cap? Datchett. I've got something that might interest you." He gave the street and apartment numbers. "No, no hurry. Half an hour will be soon enough. Be seeing you, cop-

per."

"What do you mean, no hurry?" demanded Beard as Datchett hung up.

"I want to look around before the cops get things into a mess," was the reply. "Where do you keep that film of yours, Beard?"

"Here," answered Lita for him, pulling a suitcase from under the davenport.

Beard was tenderly probing his nose. "Not broken," he reported, "but swollen up like a Durante schnozzle and sore as a boil. Where's the liquor, Lita?"

She ran to the kitchen for a bottle. He drew the cork with his teeth and swigged thirstily. "Well, Beard, what happened?" asked Datchett.

Just then Beard seemed to see Judy's body for the first time. His eyes grew round. He flopped down beside it. "Judy!" he almost screamed, then looked up wildly. "They killed her!" he wailed.

Lita stared stonily. "It's true then," she mumbled. "You two were cheating on me."

"Sure it's true," snapped the detective. "How'd you miss it up to now?" To Beard he said, "Pull yourself together and talk."

Beard goggled as he rose. "I was alone--in here."

"You mean, in this front room?"

"Yes. That is, I think so--my head still buzzes. Something hit me in the back of the head and I went down. That's all."

"Went down on your face and bumped your nose?"

"He must have," volunteered Lita, pointing to the stained rug. "There's the trail of blood that leads to the bath."

"how about Judy all this time?" Datchett asked Beard.

"She was in the back somewhere," was the answer. "In the bedroom or the bath. This--" he gestured toward the body. "It hadn't happened yet."

"You don't remember a fight?" persisted Datchett.

"Only that crack on the head."

"How long was this after Lita came down the fire escape to me?"

"Did she do that?" Beard eyed the nearly revealed body of his wife. "Paid you a visit, eh? I didn't even know she was gone."

"Of course not," snapped Lita.

"You didn't pay attention to anybody but Judy Tyrone."

"Settle your fuss some other time," cut in Datchett. "You don't recall creeping into the bathroom, Beard?"

"No, nor coming out. I woke up in here."

"Subconscious mind," suggested Lita, forgetting her grievance of a moment ago. "The killer knocked him down and then, when the fight with Judy started, he still had the dim idea of crawling away."

"One thing more," Datchett said to Beard. "Was the door locked?"

"Seems as if it was."

Datchett looked at the open window, at the position of Judy's body, then across at the door.

"He must have come up the escape, when you and I--" began Lita, then paused in confusion.

"Yeah," nodded Datchett. "When you and I were talking. Then he killed Judy and tore open the door." He stopped above the corpse, examining the position of the fallen lamp beneath it.

"But," he said slowly, "there's something screwy."

"Eh?" said Lita.

Datchett pointed. "See where her feet are? They mark the very spot where she must have been standing. And she's lying on her back, with the lamp pinned under her."

"True," nodded Beard, hand to bruised face.

"But if she knocked it down," went on Datchett, "its foot would be close to hers--it'd have to stand right next to her, see? But the lamp's foot points in the opposite direction, beyond her head and to

one side. They must have been eight feet apart. When Judy fell she wouldn't have landed anywhere near it, let alone pull it down."

He turned to look sharply at Lita, then Beard.

"I've got it," said Lita suddenly. "The lamp was knocked over before she was stabbed."

But Datchett shook his head. "If you'll remember, the light doused as she went down, and the ceiling lights weren't on."

He laid his gun on the table beside Beard's bottle, then stopped and picked up the detached plug at the end of the lamp socket. "That means the lamp was planted where it was, not knocked over and pulled loose. That also means that the murder didn't happen as we saw it. The whole thing came off to some sort of funny rules. All we can say is that the lamp was planted for a purpose--to explain the lights going out."

He faced the trembly couple. "This is a frame--and one of you two framed it!"

Beard swore in astonishment. Lita shook her head incredulously.

"All right, where's the lamp socket?" demanded Datchett.

Lita pointed to the fringe of the rug next the window. He went and scraped it back with his foot. "No socket here," he told her. "What's the idea, Lita, trying to lie out?"

"Put up your hands," she ordered suddenly.

Datchett turned and looked into the muzzle of his own gun. Lita was aiming it.

"Easy, or I'll let you have it," she said. Catching up the suitcase, she backed toward the door. "I'm going," she said.

"In that bit of floss?" said Datchett, eyeing her negligee.

"I'm going, and taking the film along," she went on. "You're smart, Datchett, but not smart enough to

catch me. When I'm gone, look for the socket under the rug on this side--you'll learn something now in the murder line."

The detective smiled tensely. "I figured on you when you said you happened to answer the phone on both threats from Nonpareil. It argued that you imagined 'em. As for your little game downstairs, that was to keep my mind off of what was going on up here, eh?"

He took a step toward her.

Lita's finger trembled on the trigger. "I'll kill you if you come any nearer," she warned. "Might as well kill two as--"

He rushed. She pulled the trigger. A dead click sounded, then he had her, twisting the gun from her hand. Her bosom heaved against his as she tried to grapple him, but he flung her roughly into a chair.

"So you admit the killing," he said, and she nodded.

"I couldn't share Joe or the money with Judy. I framed this, scared them into coming to this strange town--"

"You jumped her up when I went downstairs?"

"Stabbed her in the bathroom. Then I clubbed Joe in here, with a paperweight from the desk yonder. Judy left a smear of blood when I brought her to the window, so I hauled Joe to the bathroom and bloodied his nose to explain the trail."

Beard glared at her, then crossed to the other side of the room, revealed the socket under the rug. "What's this wire doing here?" he asked. He followed it to the davenport, pulled cushions away.

"My film projector!" he exclaimed. "Trained on the window!"

"That explains the lights going out, and the shadows on the curtain," put in Datchett.

"Yes," confessed Lita. "I used a rough-house scene Judy played once. Joe taught me enough to make it easy to wire the projector for automatic

running. When I was ready I planted the lamp as if it knocked over, plugged in the socket and started the film. You were to be my alibi--that's why I paid over fifty dollars to you."

"I'll fatten my fee a bit," grinned Datchett. He picked up the grip with the film. "Nonpareil still offers ten thousand dollars for that Holgar sunbath epic, I suppose? Well, I'll collect."

"I still don't see how you know--" began Judy.

"I knew it must be one of you two. So I left my gun--unloaded--where the guilty one could grab it and give the show away."

Beard gave Lita a final look of

loathing, turned his back and went rearward into the hall. Lita rose from her chair and came to Datchett.

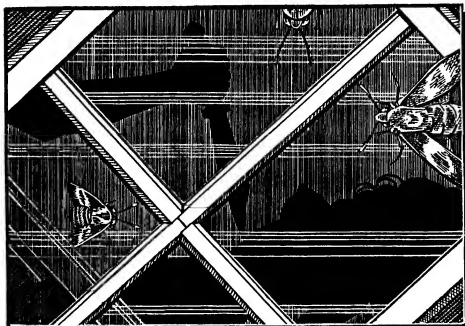
"Will you turn me in?" she said softly. "After what happened down there?"

She slid her arms around him, plastered her soft, near-naked body close to his. "Will you turn me in?" she pleaded again.

He pushed her away. "Sure I will," he said.

She sat down again, crying. A knock sounded at the door, and Datchett opened it.

"Hello, Cap," he said to Scaife. "Come on in and head this killer for the last roundup."



Continued from p. 48

under his pen name of Jerome Severs Perry. He also ran in Hollywood Detective. He was John J. "Little Jack" Horner, a troubleshooter for

Epicure Pictures. But this character enjoyed limited success.

Yes, there was only one Dan Turner. Long may he swig Vat 69!

Love Slaves of the Sandinista Torture Squad

by N. Leo Lancer

"What the hell?!" The oath exploded from Gil Matson's lips as he dropped the magazine and sent his half-empty beer can sailing through the air. He didn't notice the sound of impact as he was already lost somewhere between shock and remembrance.

Gil knew it had been a mistake six months ago when his girl Peg had broken the news that she'd decided to apply for membership as a nun. And not just any order of nuns: she joined the Maryknoll Missionary Society, who everybody knew were at least as political as religious. Peg said she felt guilty being an affluent American when so many poor people lived under capitalist exploitation (Gil knew those college courses had been a mistake, too). It was the least she could do, Peg had said, to go and give her life where it would do some good. Yeah, he'd protested, protested like hell--what guy wouldn't? But Peg had brushed it off, chalking it up to the wounded feelings, and the conservative politics, of a disappointed boyfriend.

To show he could be a sport about it, Gil had driven her up to the convent in upstate New York when the day came for her to check in. All the lonely way home down Route 9 all he'd been able to think about was the times, the caresses, they used to share, and how Sister Peggy (God, how he hated the sound of that!) would never know man's embrace again.

Sadness had turned to rage a few weeks later when Peg wrote to tell him her assignment: she would go with a group of other young novices to Nicaragua, of all places, to as-

sist the government troops in the Miskito Indian "relocation program." Gil was so mad, he hadn't been able to write her back. If he did, he knew he would simply blast her as a naive leftist being used by other leftists who were not so naive. And Gil loved her too much to lash out at her. All he could hope was that once she got down there and saw for herself what her saintly Marxists were really like, she'd wake up and get out.

It hadn't happened that way. This evenign Gil had started leafing through the new issue of Soldier of Fortune to find out what was going on in the world, and there it was, the story the pinko media would never print: SANDINISTA GESTAPO USES AMERICAN NUNS AS WHORES! A sick jolt sent his stomach reeling, and Gil had to force his eyes to keep reading down the page. Oh please let it be someone else . . . no, damn it . . . Maryknoll sisters . . . just arrived . . . Indian relocation unit. That's when the beer can crashed unheard. That's when blinding horror engulfed Gil. From somewhere in the back of his mind injured pride whispered: "The little bitch deserves what she gets!" But Gil wasn't having any. A real man, he knew, would have to do something, would have to rescue her.

He stepped across the zebra-skin rug and took down his favorite pistol and knife--the ones with the notches for Gook scalps he'd accumulated in Nam. These would do. Then he retrieved Soldier of Fortune--sure, there it was, a recruiting ad for a merc unit about to take off south of the border to join up with a band of Contra rebels. That

would at least get him within striking distance.

Gil's six-foot frame hung with two hundred pounds of solid muscle, coupled with his combat experience, cleared him quickly with the bigwigs of the operation, and in a little over two weeks he found himself with the unit cutting a path through the dense Central American rain forest. Yep, it was like being back in Nam again, though this time he had something more than LBJ to fight for, and no half-hearted sonofabitches back in the Pentagon to tell him he couldn't really fight.

He'd levelled with the commander, Colonel Packwood, about his real mission from the start, and he was willing to let Gil do his own thing once the time came. Until then, he would travel and fight with the rest of the unit. That was fine with him: hell, if Uncle Sam could have made up his mind for sure that he wanted to kick some Sandinista ass, Gil would have enlisted before now.

Packwood had heard the same story Gil had, and being closer to the action, he knew a few more details. The nuns had been sent to the jungle in response to a request from the Nicaraguan government. They were led to believe, or maybe they just assumed, they were going to be sent to teach the Indians how to read and to educate them for work they could do in their new territory--after the government forced them to get off their tribal homeland. When the bright-eyed young nuns got there they soon discovered the true nature of the service the Sandinista had in mind: a captive, traveling harem! Reports from Contra spies filtered back with sickening tales of young, shapely nuns being stripped and raped at gunpoint, gang-banged, and being subjected to worse things Gil didn't want to think about. The idea of one of those collectivist goons pawing Peg's luscious breasts

with his blood-smeared hands...! Oh yes, you better believe he was going to make those commie bastards pay!

But that wasn't all: that "relocation" stuff was, of course, bullshit. Unless you considered being planted six feet under being "relocated." It seemed the bunch who kidnapped the nuns were a special terror unit, a torture squad really, whose job was to send an unmistakable signal to the rest of the fiercely independent Miskitos that they'd better cooperate with Comrade Ortega and hotfoot it to the reservations. Reports of the torture squad's work were hard even for communist-haters like Gil Matson to believe. Apparently the squad was led by a mysterious masked figure in black who must have been a genius of gore with a degree in depravity. Gil's only hope was that these monsters would want to keep their captive love-slaves attractive for their lustful diversions after a hard day of mutilation and butchery. He could hope, and if he were wrong, he could do more than that.

Some weeks later, Gil and his unit had reached Miskito country. The many deserted villages, usually littered with bones or hastily dug mass graves, testified to both the efficiency of the relocation troops and the fighting spirit of the Miskitos, who despite their guts were just plain outgunned. Gil had acquitted himself well in the occasional clashes with Sandinista patrols --and had added several more notches. But now it was time to go his own way. Packwood and his boys had orders to continue south and join up with the Contras. From there on in they would try to stay ahead of government forces, organizing and equipping the Miskitos who would then have a few surprises waiting for the Sandinista troops.

Gil left his comrades with a round of handshakes and hugs, and after

some last-minute advice from Colonel Packwood, he disappeared into the bush. If reports from down the line could be trusted, he was near the trail of the torture squad, and this was likely to be the best chance he'd have to track them down. That might prove to be more difficult than it sounded. You wouldn't think a band of troops that traveled with its own private brothel and left such carnage in its wake would be very hard to track; trouble was, usually no one was left alive after the squad left a village. By the time someone from another village chanced to visit and found the bloody debris, the terror troops were long gone, leaving only a drifting cloud of blood-curdling rumor.

Still, from dumb luck, instinct, or whatever, it was only another couple of weeks before Gil found what he was looking for. As he broke through the wall of steamy foliage into the clearing, it was the sight of circling vultures that told him he had found his trail. Though he heard no sound of life, not even animal life, Gil approached what had been the Miskito village cautiously. The slaughterhouse stench convinced him the reports were all true. But when he saw the first bodies, or better, the first flesh, he knew he was mistaken: the reports hadn't told the half of it.

He had seen nothing like it--not even the Cong with their evil inventiveness had done anything to match it. Here there was an old man whose entrails had apparently been ripped out and stuffed down his own throat, choking him to death. There the incomplete body of an infant lay mingled with bread and cheese in such a way as to suggest it had formed part of a sandwich. Faces had been carefully stripped off and stretched out to dry on the walls of huts. Female breasts had been hacked off and nailed--nailed!--onto male torsos. A pile of human heads minus their lower jaws...

Gil wandered, dumbly gaping, through this museum of mutilation. He hardly seemed any longer in the real world; surely it had to be a nightmare! This couldn't be the work of mere men! Demons from hell, maybe. And maybe because human enemies seemed so remote, Gil let his guard down, momentarily too stunned and horrified even to remember his own safety. And in that moment--someone leapt!

The sudden impact of the assailant leaping onto his back propelled Matson out of the shadow of the overhanging hut roof he'd been walking under. And in the blazing midday sun he could easily see the shadow of the lifted knife ready to strike! Dragged abruptly back into reality, Gil let his fighting instincts take over. His foe seemed strong and wiry, but light. The first thing to do was not to try and grab the knife; it was somewhere behind and above him. No, what he did instead was to roll underneath himself in a somersault. His opponent wasn't expecting this and was suddenly slapped in the face by the heard earth as Matson disengaged himself and stood upright. Far from disorienting him, the ambush cleared his head from the stupefying scene around him. But he received another shock when he turned over his unconscious attacker and got a good look at--her!

On the ground before him lay a shapely Miskito girl, buck naked and every inch worth seeing! With a sense of relief, Gil noted that though her nose and mouth were bleeding from the impact, the girl's cheek had hit the ground, not her nose, so her beauty was unimpaired. Would-be murderess or not, this was too pretty a creature to ruin! The almond eyes, closed now in unconsciousness, rested atop high, full cheekbones which tapered to a narrow jaw framing perfect, succulent lips. The button of a nose rested nicely in the middle of it all. Her coal-black hair, though dirtied by sweat,

was a foamy flood cascading over the ground as she lay there, arms loosely extended, lying on her back and one hip. Matson's pulses raced with desire as only moments before they had raced with life-threatening danger.

He was pretty sure he knew why she had attacked him, but he wanted to hear it from her. He looked around for the knife that had flown from her hand, found it, and thrust it into his own belt. Then stooping down, he cradled her shoulders in his brawny arms and uncorked his canteen. The drink seemed to revive her. Her eyes slowly opened, began to focus, and widened in fear as the sight of Gil Matson recalled to her memory the fight a moment ago. Her muscles tensed as she sought to struggle free, but Gil had anticipated this and drew his pinioning arms tighter.

"Easy, easy," he said in the rudimentary Miskito dialect Packwood had taught him during their long weeks together trudging through the jungle. "I'm not one of those devils who did . . ." (he took in the scene in an encompassing glance) . . . "this! They are my enemies, too."

"Thank the gods!" the girl gasped in relief, relaxing again. Gil let go his grip, still supporting her with an arm about her shoulders.

"Tell me what happened. Tell me your name. I am Gil."

"I am called Alohitá," the relieved girl said. "I was away from the village, gathering flowers for the festival we would have on the morrow. In the distance I see a group of men riding in their cars and trucks. There were many women, too." At this, Gil's blood froze--many women! Alohitá, seeing his reaction, paused uncertainly.

"Go on, Alohitá," Gil said calmly, eager to hear more, but not daring to rush her into skipping what might be valuable details.

"I saw they were heading for my village. They had many guns. I heard that many villages of my people are sacked by the communistas, the men killed like pigs, the women shamed. So I try to come and warn them. When I arrive it is already too late, I was too far away and on foot. I hear the screaming--such terrible screaming! So I turn and flee into the jungle. Next day I come back and hear no screaming, so I enter. I find what you see." Here her body was racked with a great shudder of revulsion. She said no more but began to sob quietly.

"And when you heard me moving around, you thought I was one of the devils come back to kill anyone who might be left, didn't you?" Alohitá nodded, whimpering, tears falling like raindrops from her long lashes. With a mixture of compassion and desire, Matson clasped her close to him. Both sat in silence for long minutes.

Finally Gil spoke: "Alohitá, did you ever manage to get a closer look at those women?"

"Si. From the jungle I watch and see if my sisters and other Miskito women will be taken and added to the communistas' women. But communistas' women are all white, like you, Señor Gil, and all Miskito women die." Again she cried. She had a right to.

After a while: "Señor Gil, was one of the white women your woman?"

Gil had to blink back a tear of his own this time. "No, Alohitá, but one of them used to be."

Now it was the Indian girl who gathered the American into her arms. Matson did not resist. He no longer knew what he felt, what emotion drove him, but he tumbled to the ground with her, quickly shedding his stinking, begrimed fatigues. His questing hands explored her sun-bronzed curves, her breasts that were like golden jungle fruit ripe for the plucking. With sure hand, Alohitá found

his stiffening manhood and guided it home, riding him like some primordial jungle goddess astride a wild panther.

Hours late, a new sun blazing overhead, Gil and Alohitā awoke in the cooling shadows of giant jungle ferns, like Adam and Eve awaking on their first morning in Eden. The combined horror, fatigue, and passion of the previous day had stricken both with the blackness of total exhaustion. They had slept like babies amid the charnel house that surrounded them. Now, awake, they tried to put the reeking carnage out of their minds as best they could. Water from the nearby stream refreshed and cleaned them, and they sat together and took stock of the situation.

The signs of the torture squad's departure were plain; Gil would have no trouble following them from here. The immediate problem was: would he follow alone?

"Listen, Alohitā, you just escaped with your fanny intact from these monsters once. You can't risk it twice. I have to go. I can't let you come with me."

Her eyes dropped. "But Gil, I . . . love you" (she whispered this last).

Gil held her in his arms. "I guess I love you, too. But I've lost one woman to these butchers. I'm not about to lose another. Maybe when this is all over, I can come back and find you . . ." He knew there was a snowball's chance in this tropical hell of that happening. If he made it out alive, how was he going to find her? Alohitā could sense the hollowness of his words. Or maybe she, too, could see the odds only too well. In the end, Gil's reasons won out and Alohitā assured him she could go stay in another Miskito village where she had some kin--that is, if the genocide squad hadn't emptied that one, too.

With a quick but hard kiss they parted, striking out into the jungle in opposite directions. Matson's path was the easier: all he had to do was follow the broad swath the Sandinistas had cut through the dense undergrowth. There were no more roads wherever they were headed next, so they had to make their own as they went. This made it child's play not only for Gil to follow them but to gain on them, since his progress could be as fast as theirs was slow. In fact, he found he had to purposely linger back to keep the rear guard from spotting him. He hoped to catch a glimpse either of the captive women or the mysterious leader dressed, even in the sweltering jungle head, in ominous black. But he saw neither.

Of course, Alohitā had not dared get close enough to the village to observe much in detail, but she was able to tell Gil that the leader "sounded different" from the others as he shouted commands to them. Gil took this to mean that he spoke Spanish with a foreign accent, that he wasn't Nicaraguan or Cuban. KGB, probably. That didn't surprise Gil one bit. If the Ruskies advised their Latin American stooges on military matters, why not on torture? Who better at it?

Gil kept his cover in the brush while the Sandinistas found a clearing and began setting up camp. Yes, there was the leader, but not talking loud enough for Gil to play any accent. He was thin as a rail, but didn't seem to be suffering from the fierce tropical heat. And he was swathed in black from head to foot. That couldn't have made him much cooler! A uniform of some sort, maybe, but it was hard to see. And his face was obscured by a (black) pith-helmet with a veil of insect netting. A mystery man for sure.

Gil moved around the circumference of the clearing (it was a large one), trying to get a glimpse of the women. They had been surrounded by men in

the line of march, and amid the scurrying soldiers and rapidly erected tents he found it hard to get a clear view into the camp. But finally he saw them, just as they were being marched into one tent wider and higher than the rest. The portable pleasure dome of the Sandinista sadists, Gil did not doubt. His heart leapt as he thought he caught sight of Peg! But it was hard to tell, with all of them naked and dirty. He wasn't close enough to be anywhere near sure.

He waited till he dared enter the compound itself. It wasn't long before the camp was silent. After the jungle-clearing these men had done all day, there was no way they wouldn't be out cold instantly and for the whole night. Gil began to prowl.

Creeping stealthily between the tents and the snoring forms scattered here and there on the ground, Matson was surprised to see one tent near the center of the encampment with a lamp still burning. He crept closer and began to hear voices. One was punctuated by static, the other clear. A radio set, then. He listened closer to the voice of the man in the tent. Even before individual words became clear, the thick foreign accent struck him: not Russian after all, but--German! This man must be some sort of East German advisor. That fit; hadn't they been involved with the Cubans in Angola?

A bit closer; what was the leader saying? "... and tell that dumm-esel Ortega to pull those troops from the Northern offensive. Can even he not see that it is a tactical blunder? Ach, must I see to everything myself? And I want quick reprisals against those rebel sympathizers. . . . Ja? If Ortega hasn't the stomach for it, tell him I will replace him with someone who does!"

Matson's eyes widened with astonishment. He couldn't believe what he was hearing! Did the East Bloc

so completely control the Sandinistas? Even he had not suspected so much!

But he could think that one over later. Time was too precious. He had to get to the harem and find Peg. The harem tent loomed over all the others and Gil made his way gingerly towards it. There was one guard posted, but he, too, had given in to exhaustion. Just to make sure he didn't awaken at an inopportune moment, Gil sedated him with his pistol butt. The man collapsed like the sack of shit he was, as Gil lifted the tent flap and stepped inside.

The huge structure reminded him of a circus tent. Not only was it large and vaulted, but in the moonlit darkness one could make out strange shapes like some kind of equipment. Either torture instruments or sex devices . . . or (God) both!

There were the women, the nuns, though he'd almost forgotten that. As he saw their shapely young bodies, he marvelled that so many cute young babes like Peg had thrown away their youth, trading it in for an old maid's life of mourning and penance. And of course this group had gotten much more than they bargained for!

Gil thought all this as he stooped down looking from face to face among those sleeping on side or back. Finally he found her! Peg was filthy and unkempt, like the others, but thank God, she didn't seem to have been physically injured. He must wake her gently, so as not to wake the others and cause commotion. Sneaking Peg out of here was his only aim now. He'd have to come back with reinforcements to free the others.

"Peg . . . Peg . . ." he whispered, stroking her cheek. Her eyes finally opened a crack, and it took several seconds before she could make out his features, several more before his identity registered.

"Gil? Can it really be Gil? Has the United States invaded us as the

Sandinistas said they would?"

"They haven't, but I have! Now, keep your voice down, baby, and we're going to get the hell out of here!"

Some of the others began to wake up, but they just rolled over and went back to sleep. Apparently having a man come into the tent and pick out one of the women was nothing out of the ordinary.

Peg's eyes rounded in startlement.

"What's the matter, baby, aren't you . . .?" The stock of a rifle to the back of his skull answered Gil's question for him.

It seemed he awoke on the same spot where he had fallen, at least close to it. He shook his head to scatter the water they'd dashed in his face. His head still throbbed from the hours-old blow, and the pain was harder to shake out. Of course he was tied securely. Gil rose to his knees with difficulty.

What he saw first was Peg, but it was not a welcome sight: she was hanging naked, bound in manacles, suspended from two chains slung over a beam that had been erected across the top of the tent. It looked even more like the circus big-top in daylight, but Gil desperately hoped he would not see, or be, one of the circus acts. He tried to catch Peg's eye, but her head sagged to her chest, her eyes probably closed. Her low moaning was all that indicated she was conscious.

"A schöne sight, don't you agree, Herr Matson?"

Gil struggled to turn and face the source of the voice behind him. He wanted to see the East German bigshot face to face. That turned out to be impossible, since he was seated high up on a big bamboo throne mounted atop an upraised dais. Even had he been closer, he still wore the same costume of the previous night, black helmet, veil and all. Gil had been right about the uniform, though. Damned if it didn't

look a lot like the old SS uniforms.

"A lot more schöne than the sight you'll make when I'm done with you, commie bastard!" Livid hatred seethed in Matson's voice, but his captors seemed merely amused. After all, given the present situation, it didn't look as if they had much to worry about.

"Spare me your impotent threats, my troublemaking Americanische friend. We detected you easily in your clumsy attempt to follow us unnoticed, then lured you into the seraglio where we knew your mindless American lusts would drive you. Now I mean to learn of your mission. What did your imperialist masters hope to gain by sending you here?"

"My only master is me! Nobody sent me; I came on my own." Gil was in a real bind now: if he told them his real motive, they'd realize what Peg meant to him and she'd be in even greater danger than she was already! "Besides, isn't it a free country? Ever since you Sandinistas 'liberated' it, I mean? What are you, anyway--East German advisor or something?"

This seemed to amuse Gil's captor no end. He rocked back and forth in his chair with laughter. When his hysterics finally subsided, he gasped for breath and calmed down enough to speak.

"Such curiosity in a doomed man! Ha ha! Why, my Americanische friend, you have it all wrong, quite wrong indeed!" He didn't seem to want to say more.

"Why all the torture? The Miskitos must be worth more to the government alive than dead. But if they're not, why not just kill them and be done with it? And why treat these women like this?" Gil nodded toward Peg.

"I will show you how I treat the women since you are so interested, mein freund." Over Gil's cries of protest, the German directed two thugs armed with long rods to go stand underneath Peg. At his signal

they began touching her flesh with the now electrified cattle prods. At each jab, she shrieked and involuntarily recoiled. Alternately, each touched her first from one side, then from the other, and Peg executed a frantic aerial dance of pain, twitching and swinging like an acrobat in some circus in hell. After what seemed endless minutes no less for Gil than for her, the German signalled his goons to stop.

As the echoes of Peg's screaming began to die away, the German addressed Gil: "Notice, if you will, Herr Matson, how the prods leave no mark on the fraulein's so schöne body. As she is my own favorite, I do not want her visibly damaged." Gil's fury and horror were so great he could not speak. Nor did he know which more horrified him: the nerve-rendering spectacle he had just seen, or the awful knowledge that this monster had used Peg's body to sate his own foul lusts! But he was speaking again.

"Now to your questions! As to why I treat this woman so: I mean to show you what is in store for you if you fail to cooperate. And let me assure you, Herr Matson, this is only the beginning. Believe me, I have had long years of experience in such matters. In fact, in the end I think I shall make you a eunuch and set you guard over my beauties, since you seem so interested in them! Yes, that would be quite fitting! Hahaha!

"Oh, yes, you were also interested in the welfare of the poor Indians, weren't you? I derive great amusement from them, though there is a genuine scientific zeal in my little experiments. How interesting to see what the poor devils can endure before they lose sanity, and then how insanity seems to raise the threshold of pain, until, of course, I apply new methods to cross the new threshold, und so weiter. It is all most intriguing if one has a certain scientific curiosity." Gil shuddered in spite of himself.

"As to my own identity: I think I shall tell you because you may possibly recognize me, unlike these ignorant savages who serve me. You will carry the knowledge no further in any event."

With that, the German took off his pith-helmet, revealing his wrinkled, surprisingly old face. But it was Gil who spoke his name.

"Mengele!"

The face smiled.

"But you're . . . they found your skull . . . the dental records proved . . ."

"Come, come, do you not think a man of my medical expertise can simulate such evidence? I, the Death Angel, have cheated death! My old friends and colleagues in the Fuhrer's service have all grown old and died, but Josef Mengele will not join them in Valhalla. All my experiments in the concentration camps were dedicated to one great goal: that I might gain the secret of prolonging life and vitality forever! And I did gain that secret, though mountains of Jewish flesh and blood had to be consumed in the search!"

Mengele's eyes now glowed with an insane light. He seemed to forget his listeners and to ramble on as if speaking to history itself: "I have lived on in secrecy, finally feigning my death when the Jewish jackals became too much of a nuisance. Quietly I have gained power here, turning this insignificant little country into a base from which to extend my power into the whole hemisphere. The decadent Americans will never muster the will to stop me, and when the Russian fools realize my true aims it will be too late! I will destroy both East and West, and from their ashes will rise the glorious Fourth Reich! And I, Josef Mengele, ageless and undying, will be her sole Kaiser throughout her whole thousand-year dominion!"

Gil Matson stared incredulously, both knowing the man to be insane and realizing with horror that there

was every chance for his nightmarish scheme to succeed. What could he do? He must try something . . . wait, what was Mengele doing now? He had stood to his feet and stepped to the edge of the dais.

"Perhaps you doubt the truth of my claims, my inferior American friend? Vielleicht you think that Mengele is simply a doddering old man who has become a bit toll in the head? I will give you a demonstration of my virility. Juan! Esteban! Bring me the fraulein!"

Mengele descended the steps and began to unfasten his belt, then dropped his breeches, as his goons dragged the barely conscious Peg to him. He meant to take her right here, right now! In front of him! Without thinking further, Matson sprang to his feet, bent over, and charged, hoping to give Mengele a good head-butt before he went down with a bullet.

But the would-be Fuhrer's bodyguards were much more alert than their dull, ape-like appearance suggested. One of them, still carrying his cattle-prod, jabbed it like a lightning bolt into Gil's midsection, and he dropped, mercifully unconscious.

This time no cold water awoke him. Instead it was a woman's voice that penetrated the curtains of blackness and wooed him back to awareness.

"Senor Gil! Wake up! Por favor, Gil!" Could it be Peg? No, no, that sounded like . . . Alohit! Now Matson struggled awake more rapidly. What was the Miskito girl doing here? Had she followed, against his orders, and been captured?

But no, she was free and quickly freeing him of the ropes that cut into his bloodless wrists and, now, his ankles as well. As Gil returned completely to wakefulness, he became newly aware of the rat-a-tat-tat of gunfire, a lot of it, outside.

"Alohit! Tell me what's happening out there! They're not killing all the women, are they?"

"No, Senor Gil! They have rescued them! Come, I will show you!" They? Who? Alohit took his hand and led him out of the prison tent into the night. Illumined by the blaze of gunfire, Gil could see the corpse of the guard with Alohit's stone knife still implanted between his ribs. She led him to the outer perimeter of the camp, then around it to the other side, where the gunfire seemed to be concentrated. As they approached the group of men in camouflage fatigues, one of them advanced to meet him.

"Colonel Packwood!"

"Yeah, Gil, and just in time to save your ass, from the look of things! Though really the credit goes to this brave little lady," indicating Alohit.

"But how?"

Alohit spoke; this part of the story was hers. "When I left you, I made for the village of my kinfolk. When I arrive, the village is filled with Americans like you! And what is more, all of them know you!"

Sure! Packwood and his boys were headed for other Miskito villages to organize and combat-train the Indians! Lucky for him one of them happened to be the same village Alohit was headed for! From the look of it, Packwood's men had done their job well: his rescue party was a motley assortment of Americans, Contra troops, and howling Miskitos who were opening up with those AK-47s like kids with new toys! And with the savage's sense of aim, they were making mincemeat of the Sandinistas who had been rudely awakened from sleep.

"Alohit said you rescued the women, Colonel Packwood. All of them safe?"

"Yes, let me show you." As they made their way back into the relative safety of the jungle, Packwood explained the rescue operation.

"With Alohit's help we first determined just where the nuns were being held. Luckily it was close to the rim of the camp circle. Then we began attacking from the other side, drew their fire there, and sent some men to the big tent. They escorted the nuns out and around the rim to safety."

They had reached a spot on the path the Sandinistas had cleared two days before. The women were huddled there, some asleep from nervous exhaustion despite the noise. Matson rapidly surveyed the faces as he had done in the tent the other night. Only this time there was no Peg! He wheeled about.

"Colonel, she's not here! I've got to go back and find her!"

Packwood began to protest, saw it would do no good, and said instead, "Good luck, old man--you'll need it! Just a minute . . . here, these might help you." Suddenly he was holding out Gil's pistol and knife. Alohit must have managed to retrieve them earlier.

Gil mumbled his thanks and sprinted down the path, not noticing the tear in the almond eye of Alohit. Having just saved the life of the man she loved, now she had to watch him return to that inferno to risk his life for another woman!

As Gil retraced his path around the circumference of the camp, he tried to figure just where the hell Peg might be, that is, if Mengele hadn't already tortured her to death. Only one possibility made any sense. Peg had been Mengele's favorite--Gil wouldn't soon forget that remark the bastard! Perhaps he had taken her to his own tent in the center of the compound before the attack had begun. Then, once it started, maybe he'd decided to keep her there with him, emulating Hitler with his beloved Eva Braun at his side at the end.

All the Sandinistas seemed to be occupied with the battle raging at the far end of the camp, so Gil

met no obstruction. It took only minutes to make his way to the command tent. And, sure enough, the lamp was lit and by its light he could see two forms, one of them apparently struggling against ropes. He paused before the tent flap uncertainly; he couldn't count on Mengele not having a gun, and it might be suicide just to walk in. On the other hand . . .

Gil's deliberations were cut short as Mengele sprang through the tent flap like a striking tiger! His claw-like hands locked into Matson's brawny neck with an astonishing steely grip. The old man's strength was incredible, Gil thought before thought began to slip away into suffocated oblivion. By instinct rather than design, Gil sent one knee into Mengele's groin and sent the macabre warrior reeling. Blood began to flow again and strength returned. But when Gil had regained his strength, so had Mengele!

The old man next produced a knife from somewhere and lunged toward the American. On he came: gaunt yet tirelessly powerful, Mengele seemed the very incarnation of the Grim Reaper. But Gil Matson's time hadn't come. An upthrust fist blocked the knife-wielding forearm, while its twin drove home a hammer blow to the Nazi's midsection. As Mengele staggered, Gil completed the treatment with another punch square on the chin. Mengele went down, hard.

Gil only now remembered the weapons in his belt. Should he use them to put an end to Mengele's threat forever?

His shoulder stung! Grazed! The gunfire had shifted, coming closer! That must mean the Sandinistas were falling back. Of course Packwood had no way of knowing where Gil was and couldn't have done any different at this point had he known. He had to fire where the enemy was. Matson realized he had time only to untie Peg and try to get her to

safety. Reluctantly he left Mengele lying in the dirt and entered the tent.

Peg was wild with excitement, having heard the struggle on the other side of the tent wall, not ten feet away. Now relief flooded her to see which one of the combatants entered the tent. Quickly Gil bent to untie her wrists and ankles, leaving the gag in place for time's sake. She could still run with a gag in her mouth, and both of them had better do some running, he told her. That gunfire was getting closer and wilder all the time.

Once outside the tent, Gil could see Sandinistas running in desperate retreat. He wanted to kill a few, but getting Peg out of this madhouse was all that mattered now.

They managed to make it to the jungle without incident. By now Peg had untied the gag herself and was sucking in great lungfuls of the stifling tropical air. As they came in sight of Packwood's men, one of them signalled the Colonel, who in turn gave the hi-sign to a Contra soldier poised with an armed rocket-launcher. "OK, Manuel, blow those bastards back to hell where they belong!"

No sooner said than done, and in a split second the night sky mimicked noonday as the Sandinista camp exploded into a blinding fireball.

When the ringing in their ears subsided, Peg asked Gil, "Do you think Mengele's dead? For real this time?"

"I don't know, honey. He didn't look like he was going to wake up soon after that punch I landed, and if he didn't there's no way he could

have escaped in time. Still..." He looked over toward the raging holocaust, like a miniature Dresden, and wondered.

Next day as the unit counted its dead, bound up its wounds, and made ready to march, Gil asked the newly clothed Peg the question that had been on his mind ever since the adventure began.

"So what now, baby? Back to the States?"

"Yes, I suppose so, Gil, for my next assignment, anyway."

"For your . . . what the hell? You mean you haven't learned anything from all this?"

"Nothing I didn't know before--that the world's full of evil. That's why I entered the order in the first place: to be on the front lines fighting that evil."

Somehow Gil wasn't surprised at this. In fact, deep down, maybe he'd even expected it all along.

"I guess you know I still love you, Peg. What would you say to one more roll in the hay, or in the underbrush, I guess, for old times' sake? We could sneak away from the others for a while . . . I mean, your 'vow of chastity' is pretty much shot to hell now anyway, right?"

"Gil Matson! You seem to forget you're talking to a nun!"

"Yeah, I guess I am at that." Gil wasn't really mad anymore. Rescuing her from the Sandinista torture squad had been the main thing, and he had done that. If he'd just wanted a good lay, there would have been a lot easier ways to get one. Come to think of it, didn't he see Alohitia snooping behind the ferns over there?

Miss High - Hat

by Robert E. Howard

Dear Editor:

At the college which I attended a few years ago, there was a girl who can only be described by the term "high hat." She patronized the rest of us and always had some sneering or belittling remark to make. When anything came up, she always took her share of the pleasure, but always scornfully refused to do her share of the work.

This went on until one day one of the dormitory matrons took a bunch of us girls on an outing into the country a short distance. We all took along food, and when we stopped for lunch, we all helped build a fire and prepare the food. All except Miss High-hat.

The matron was a good woman, but she did insist on obedience. She didn't like the way the girl was acting, but she didn't say anything until after the lunch was over and we were all sitting around talking. Then she asked her to do some little task, very politely, and the girl merely curled her lip. The matron repeated the command, sharply, and the girl became extremely impudent. Then the matron broke loose.

"Miss Sauciness," said she grimly, "what you need is a good bottom-warming and here's where you get it!"

And she snatched that insolent flapper up, in spite of her protests and struggles, and turned her across her lap. And right there

before us all, she jerked up the girl's dress and took off her drawers. How that flapper screamed and wiggled and kicked! And the matron's open hand going smack-smack-smack-smack! on her bare seat. And before she stopped Miss Sauciness was crying and begging for mercy and her behind was red at a rose. She apologized to the matron and you never saw such a change in a girl! One of the girls had brought a Kodak along and while the spanking was going on, she took a picture of the whole scene, unbeknownst to the matron.

After that, whenever the girl would start getting high hat, someone would bring out that picture and hold it up where she could see it.

Somehow there is nothing so humiliating and ridiculous as to be spanked before a crowd of the other girls and when she remembered how she looked lying across the matron's lap exposed so immodestly, while her bare sitting place was being spanked, she realized that she wasn't so much after all.

She got to be a real nice girl and a good chum, and everybody liked her. That wasn't the only girl the matron spanked--she was a believer in old time discipline and she took down several pairs of bloomers before the year was over--but the spanking she gave to that girl did more real good than any of them.

Helen

The Spicy Sleuths

by Will Murray

Of all Culture Publications' magazines, Spicy Detective Stories was the most heavily populated with series characters. And it was all Dan Turner's fault.

More correctly, it was the fault of the Hollywood detective's creator, Robert Leslie Bellem. No one living knows for certain what prompted Bellem to create the sloshed sleuth. Turner just appeared one day in a story entitled, "Murder by Proxy," in the second (June 1934) issue of Spicy Detective. And he kept coming back. Readers--Culture's readers, anyway--loved the guy. Maybe it was Turner's two-fisted approach to detecting, maybe it was Bellem's tongue-in-cheek style. Who knows? But it was clear that the minute your eyes skated across the opening paragraph of a Dan Turner yarn, perhaps despite your better judgment, you were dragged into the story--as the following Turner leads aptly attest:

It startled the bejabbers out of me when this cute little blonde wren ankled into my apartment that evening and began stripping out of her threads.

I said: "Brother, you may be Max Amberg's secretary and you may think you're hard as hell. But if you don't let me see your boss, I'll soften you up like a dish of wet cornflakes."

I don't like to be shot at, especially on my birthday.

I woke up in a mahogany coffin.

I opened my bedroom closet.

A half-dressed feminine corpse sagged into my arms.

Literally a couple hundred Dan Turner stories subsequently appeared in Spicy Detective Stories and her sister magazines. But even Bellem wasn't prolific enough to single-handedly satisfy the demand for wise-cracking P.I.'s with an eye for a little leg. Before long, the sons of Dan Turner began to jostle him for space. They were bastard offspring, to be sure, usually affecting the same extreme slanginess combined with exaggerated toughness that has prompted some critics to declare, wrongly, that Bellem was writing satire. He was not; he was simply writing a one-note theme into the ground. If the Dan Turner stories ever did get around to parody, they parodied the earlier Dan Turner stories. No more.

But even the pages of Spicy Detective weren't capacious enough to house the drunken dick boom Culture had triggered. In 1937, Trojan Publications, their somewhat tamer publishing--er--limb, birthed Private Detective Stories. It contained much the same authors, style and H. J. Ward covers as its racier cousin. Even Dan Turner popped up in its pages. He starred in the lead novel in the first issue, June 1937, Murder on the Sound Stage---"Proving Justice in Blonde in Hollywood," according to the cover blurb. It was one of the rare Turner novels.

Even if the covers weren't quite as racy as her big sister, the magazine's subtitle, "Intimate Revelations of Private Investigators," made one pause to consider precisely what the editors meant by private

investigators. Certainly the Trojan gang investigated their share of--um--privates over the years.

No matter, because outward appearances aside, there wasn't much difference between Spicy Detective Stories and Private Detective Stories. The latter did run lead novels during its early years, which no Spicy title ever attempted. And almost from its inception, the editors freely reprinted stories--and covers--from Private Detective to Spicy Detective and--er--vice versa.

And the multitude of series characters which had spawned in the Spicy titles often appeared in Private Detective. It wasn't uncommon for one of them to appear in the March Spicy Detective and again in the April Private Detective. It was as if the writers were under orders to churn out stories and investigators by the ream, and the manuscripts went into one big pile. If a story ended up in Spicy, the illustrations were sexier. If it found itself in Private, the artwork was tamer--but only a little.

So, for all intents and purposes, one might consider Spicy Detective Stories and Private Detective Stories in reality a single magazine being published twice a month under two different titles and numbering systems.

But it didn't stop there. Private Detective must have sold like crazy, no doubt because some newsstands would display it where the Spices could not--ah--penetrate. Thus, in 1938, Trojan suddenly flooded the racks with two parallel lines, the Candids and the Romantics. The Candid line consisted of Candid Detective and Candid Love. The Romantics were comprised of Romantic Detective, Romantic Western, Romantic Adventure and Romantic Love. The only difference is that some of the Candids and Romantics featured photo covers. Otherwise it was the same pool of writers and characters.

The Romantic and Candid groups were short-lived. None seems to have lasted much more than a year. Collectors of the Spicy pulps don't bother with them as a rule. Most don't realize they exist. For that matter, the same collectors don't usually consider Private Detective Stories worth collecting with the same fervor with which they pursue the Spices.

But these magazines are not only nearly identical with the Spices, they also provide important clues to one of the most tantalizing mysteries surrounding the Spicy line: namely, who lurked behind the house and pen names that graced its contents pages.

You see, the editors were very sloppy or very sloshed. Or maybe they were just having fun. Because when a character jumped from a Spicy to a Private or a Candid, the byline would change. Not always, of course, but enough to reveal some secrets.

Take Cliff Cragin. He was E. Hoffmann Price's New Orleans private snoop. He appeared almost always under Price's name in both magazines. But once, inexplicably, one yarn was run under Price's well-known pseudonym of Hamlin Daly. Although not as famous as Dan Turner, Cragin had a long career stretching from 1934 into the forties. In one of the few Cliff Cragin novels, Death's Black Roses (Private Detective, September 1937), Cragin set up a new office in San Francisco, The Golden Gate Detective Agency. He later branched out to form the Golden Gate Correspondence School of Detection. It was not terribly successful.

Price had another tough dick, Honest John Carmody, so called because he was too honest to stay a cop. He quit and became a private investigator. According to Price, "Honest John was no beauty. He had a mug like a harvest moon and his hair could not be combed to disguise that thin spot. But he was a full two yards tall, and his shoulders

were nearly as broad as the garage entrance." Honest John first appeared in a story called "Honest John" in Private Detective, May 1938, but was soon appearing in Spicy Detective.

Price's third P.I., Jeff Dargan, also enjoyed a long life. He started his fictitious life as an investigator for Corey & Cogdon in New Orleans. When he fell into the pages of Private Detective Stories, he was fired, and like Jeff Cragin, ended up working in San Francisco. In later years he went off to war, served in the North African campaign, and returned to the U.S. as a somewhat more morose detective.

New Orleans P.I.s seem to be a Spicy staple. Eddie Carveth, of the Eddie Carveth Protective Detective Agency, also operated in that city. He was a trouble-shooter for the nightclubs of the French Quarter, enjoying free drinks, chorus girls and sour looks from Police Lieutenant Pete Murphy. William B. Rainey was the author of his Spicy Detective cases, but in Private Detective Wyatt Blassingame signed his own name.

John Ryan was both a byline and the name of a character. Some of the stories featuring detective John Ryan were bylined Roger Torrey, others claimed John Ryan himself as the author, indicating that the John Ryan byline was a Torrey pseudonym. Private Detective ran a series about a detective named Sam Drake, which were also signed Sam Drake. Torrey again?

James H. S. Moynahan had a P.I. named Ed Bryne running--and I do mean running--in Private Detective. However, when Bryne popped up in Spicy Detective, the author was usually given as Henri St. Maur, a name that becomes suggestive when you realize that Moynahan's middle initials stand for Henry Seymour.

Bryne was a fairly nondescript P.I.--many of them were. A classic example was John Bard's Spicy detec-

tive, Eddie Pell. He was a detective, had a secretary and an office. That's about as full a picture as reading one of his cases surrenders. The format usually called for first-person narratives, and even fictional detectives weren't in the habit of describing themselves in much detail.

Justin Case's Peeper Poole was a little different. His cases were narrated by his sidekick, Benny Beeman. Peeper was really P. Percy Poole, a newspaperman for the Recorder. Benny was his cameraman, and the eye through which the reader enjoyed Peeper's stories, which began with "Sleep, Baby, Sleep" in the September 1937 Private Detective. It was about a girl who went to sleep and wouldn't wake up. Poole must have specialized in such cases, because months later he handled a vaguely similar situation in "She Slept Too Long" (Private Detective, June 1938). Justin Case was, of course, Hugh B. Cave.

Another newspaperman sleuth was the one and only Billy Carter. Spicy Detective was his stamping ground. He wasn't as slangy as some of the others, but he was tough. The first Bill Carter story was "Redheads Always Win," in the August 1935 Spicy Detective. Norvell W. Page penned his adventures as N. Wooten Page. It didn't matter whether Carter's stories appeared in a Spicy or not. Page never let his real name appear on a Bill Carter story.

The same was true for Horton Jacques. He had a character named Joe Trimmo. Trimmo was known as the River Wards dick, because he operated out of an office in the River Ward's Club. He was slightly older, but still had an eye for a well-rounded thigh. Horton Jacques doesn't sound like the kind of a name a mother would saddle her son with, so it's probably a pseudonym. But even when Trimmo jumped from Spicy Detective to Private Detective, Jacques kept his true monicker to himself.

John Allison billed himself as

the crack investigator for Gem Indemnity, Inc. He specialized in recovering stolen baubles. His adventures appeared mostly in Spicy Detective, bylined either Harley L. Court or Ellery Watson Calder, depending on the mood author Robert Leslie Bellem and his editors were in.

The most puzzling case of double bylines had to do with the author of the S. W. Humphrey series, who was also the author of the Tim Sloan and Mike Cockrell series. Each of these series shared the same two bylines: Dale Boyd and Wallace Kayton. But there was no pattern to their use of the dual bylines. Boyd was used as freely in the Spicies as it was in the Trojan titles. The reverse was also true.

Stylistically, all three series are identical. That should indicate that Wallace Kayton was a pen name for Dale Boyd. Or maybe vice versa.

However, one of Boyd's characters, Mike Cockrell, appeared in early issues of Spicy Detective under the bylines of Cary Moran, Carl Moore and Mort Lansing--further confusing the matter. Moran was a fairly prolific Spicy author. Once a story appeared under the alternate byline of Carol Moran. If this was a meaningful typo--as opposed to a meaningless typo--then this may be a clue. It's possible that Cary Moran, Carl Moore, Mort Lansing, Wallace Kayton and Dale Boyd were all really Carol Moran. If there was a Carol Moran.

But the mystery gets deeper.

The second issue of Private Detective featured the lead novellette, "Painter of Death," by Cary Moran. It featured Daily Telegraph columnist Johnny Harding, his gal Friday, Nora Fanning, and their chauffeur, Lord Byron. This novelette was announced with much fanfare in the previous issue, in which it was claimed that Johnny Harding stories "have appeared in national magazines, between covers in book form, and two motion-picture companies are now bidding against each

other for the privilege of being the first to present Johnny Harding on the screen."

I've never heard of a Johnny Harding film. But the National Union Catalogue lists one Cary Moran novel, Killer's Caress. It was published in 1936 by Valhalla Press--the same outfit that published other stuff by Spicy writers. No doubt this is the Johnny Harding novel. But that doesn't mean Cary Moran isn't a fictitious name. Valhalla also published a novel by "Grant Lane," a sometime pseudonym of Steve Fisher.

When a pulp editor talks of "national magazines," it's usually a euphemism for slicks like The Saturday Evening Post. Yet the only magazine I can find that carried Johnny Harding stories are issues of Spicy Mystery. The byline? Well, take your pick. Some appeared as Cary Moran, and at least one each by Mort Lansing and Foster Preston--the latter a probable house name.

In a further questionable practice, whenever this author's stories were reprinted, one of the other pen names in the pool would cover that fact, a fate usually reserved for house names. One new name, Clint Morgan, enters the pool via this circumstance. He had a series featuring Broadway detective Macy Mingo running in Spicy Detective. It's vaguely possible, of course, that none of these bylines were personal pen names, but house names the Spicy editors maintained for the exclusive purpose of concealing the true identity of this one author, who might have been too lazy or disinterested to coin his own pseudonyms.

In an unusual wrinkle, the bylines Cary Moran, Carl Moore, Mort Lansing and Clint Morgan (note the "Mor" construction they have in common) all appear prior to 1938. In 1938, suddenly those names are retired and the Dale Boyd/Wallace Kayton bylines replace them. Why this would be almost defies explanation.

Further research results in the Spicy bylines of Luke Terry and

Charles Daw being absorbed into the post-1938 group of names. The May 1938 issue of Spicy Detective listed a story entitled "A Matter of Black-mail" by Luke Terry on its contents page. But the story itself was by-lined Dale Boyd. Later, in the November 1941 Private Detective, the same names are reversed on one story! Normally a slip like this--and there were many in the Culture/Trojan offices--involved the author's true name, but this may not be the case here. And Luke Terry drags in with it the byline Charles Daw because those two names were attached to a series featuring a tough dick named Ragan. Inasmuch as Ragan sometimes has a first name--Phil--and sometimes not, it can't be said with certainty that this is a series. But that's the Spicies for you.

There was also a series featuring a detective named Regan, first name sometimes given as Red, and other times not given at all. Arthur Wallace and Thomas H. King were the names attached to this Private Detective series--again, assuming it was a series.

It's too bad Lansing/Moore/Moran/Morgan/Boyd/Kayton/Terry/Daw's real identity isn't known. He was a prolific Spicy writer. And his S. W. Humphrey character was especially interesting. Humphrey was a Kansas City P.I. Big, blunt, and brutal, he was exactly what you'd expect of a guy whose initials stood for--honest to God!--Smith & Wesson. Talk about tough!

And Mike Cockrell wasn't any softer. He's supposed to be a P.I., but he's known in the business as a "legalized gunman that never brings in a yegg alive," according to "Winter's Payoff" (Spicy Detective, December 1936). By that time, Cockrell had solved nine cases successfully. In each case, he shot the culprit dead. At the end of this story, he's ten for ten. "Not bad for an old guy of forty-four," Cockrell boasts.

The Jarnegan series, bylined Cary Moran, was a bit different. Jarnegan was a little county sleuth of some type, who usually stepped in to solve the cases of fat Sheriff Jud Tolliver in what seems to be a rural setting. The author wasn't too explicit about unimportant details like Jarnegan's full name, occupation and area of operation. Just his taste of girlfriends.

Tim Sloan stood out, not for his build, wenching or drinking habits, but because of his secretary, Miss Emma Hohenberger. She was a Spicy rarity, a plain jane. She had two vices, silken underwear and Tim Sloan. But Sloan treated her like office furniture, and Emma, curiously, never wore her negligees. "They were too holy for her," the author wrote seriously, "she stuck with rayon and muslin." Emma just collected them--against the day Tim Sloan succumbed to her wiles, perhaps. This series appeared alternately under the names Wallace Kayton and Dale Boyd.

The second story that carried two bylines, Dale Byod and Luke Terry, was also part of one of the mysterious and prolific author's dual character series. Murder--from A to Z in Private Detective, November 1941, was the first novel chronicling the career of the detective team of Griffin & Ezell. They got together when lawyer Vic Ezell helped musclebound peeper Bud Griffin beat a manslaughter rap. They went into business together, forming the most successful P.I. team in the Southwest. Their secretary, Ruth Meyer, was practically the third member of the outfit. She and Vic were an item.

If one wanted to take a stab at this scribe's identity, one might postulate the prolific W. T. Ballard, writing partner of the even more prolific Robert Leslie Bellem. Ballard is known to have written extensively for Trojan/Culture, but none of his known pseudonyms ever appeared

in those magazines.

In later years, under the name of Dale Boyd, Super-Detective featured a brief series starring one Abba the Absolute. Abba was a mystic crime fighter who had once been Eddie Jones, a smalltime crook. Jones repented, went off to Tibet, and returned to the U.S. to fight crime. He was assisted by a girl named Zerda. Supposedly, Ballard and Bellem were responsible for filling up every issue of Super-Detective from 1940 to 1943. Bellem's work in that magazine is well documented, so that leaves Ballard a very likely suspect in the chain of identities that can be traced back from Dale Boyd. (Most of the short stories in Super-Detective during that period actually consisted of reprints from Private Detective Stories decorated with illustrations lifted from Spicy Detective.)

On the other hand, these stories do sometimes display a rather feminine touch, such as Emma Hohenberger's reverence for silk undies. Several women were known to be frequent contributors of Cultural prose, but their identities and bylines are murky at best.

And to confuse matters even more, the National Union Catalogue lists a 1945 pamphlet published by the U.S. Government called Still Picture Photography, which is attributed to a writer named Mort W. Lansing. A lot of pulp writers went to Washington to help with the war effort, so it would not be unusual for an ex-Spicy writer to end up scribbling for the bureaucrats. But was this the same Mort Lansing? Who knows?

But we're getting far afield from the subject of the Spicy Sleuths.

An interesting specimen of the breed was James A. Lawson's Dallas Duane. Never heard of him? He was better known by his suggestive sobriquet, "Hard Guy." Hard Guy worked the oil boom towns of the Southwest exclusively. An itinerant newspaperman named Specs Norton horned in

on his cases most of the time. Occasionally, the James A. Lawson name would be garbled into Lawton Jamison. But in the late forties, this Spicy hero resurfaced in Private Detective. James P. Olsen claimed to be Hard Guy's creator in those stories. One is reminded of the modern novels featuring Mack Bolan, the Executioner, whose byword is: "Stay hard!"

The Spicies seldom trafficked in double entendre, but they did show up from time to time. And in the lead line of the story, "Star Witness" (Spicy Detective, May 1937): "The squad had good rooms in the best hotel in Beaverville." Or the attractive young minx in A. J. Borden's suggestively titled "Yawning Chasms" (Spicy Detective, July 1939), who bore the intriguing name of Clita Henslow.

Not all the Spicy Sleuths were, strictly speaking, detectives. There was Justin Case's the Eel. He was a gentleman crook who found himself on the side of the angels more often than not. It got to be such a habit that in later years the Eel, whose true name is some kind of secret, went legit and became a licensed private snoop. And so incurred the wrath of a cop named Mack Creedy, who continued to hound the Eel until he retired. I don't know, but I assume he earned his nickname because he's a slippery character. The Eel had the distinction of appearing in Spicy Detective, Spicy Mystery, and Spicy-Adventure Stories. Not even Dan Turner enjoyed such exposure.

George A. MacDonald's hulking Cupid Cain apparently never appeared in any Spicy title. He first began spy-hunting in Private Detective Stories during the war. The first story, "Cain Killed Abel," appeared in the December 1943 issue. It must have been very popular with readers, because not only did Cain land a regular berth in Private Detective, but the September 1944 issue reprinted "Cain Killed Abel" under

the house name of William Decatur. Cain was a shamus who had picked up the nickname "Killer" Kane as a New York P.I. prior to going to work for the mysterious Mr. X, a Washington Intelligence officer. Cain and the distinction of being one of the first pulp powerhouses to pack a .357 Magnum.

William G. Bogart's Tony Long was an ordinary P.I. He ran the Long & Short Investigators Agency. Short was Bess Short, one of the rare distaff detectives to romp through the Culture titles. This series ran, variously, under Bogart's pen name of Russell Hale and under the apparent house name of John Ford.

Male/female detective teams seemed to be a popular Spicy staple, their seeming chauvinism notwithstanding. Stewart Gates had an early series running in Spicy Detective featuring a dick named Pete--last name apparently unimportant because the author didn't go out of his way to mention it--and his sidekick, Kay Morgan.

Their arrangement was very similar to that of the Tate-Ware Agency, run by Harley Tate and Diana Ware--although Diana acted as if she had controlling interest in the firm. Alan Anderson was the author of this series. He was a real person. Imagine that. A real person writing under his very own name. Robert Leslie Bellem and E. Hoffmann Price were not alone.

But my favorite Spicy Sleuth was Sally the Sleuth, the comic strip heroine whose adventures ran in Spicy Detective Stories for most of its run. She started out as a baby-faced blonde cop working under cover for a boss known only as the Chief, and was sometimes assisted by a tough little kid named Peanuts. If detecting was an odd pastime for a little kid, you have to understand the fringe benefits Peanuts enjoyed. Sally managed to lose her clothes in every--er--strip. It happened so often that one day the Chief was

forced to remark, "Sally, you get dumber every day." So it seemed. But as the thirties slipped into the forties, Sally dressed more demurely, lost her baby fat and gained an extra two pages of feature per issue. She didn't lose her clothes as much or as often, especially after Spicy Detective became Speed Detective, and so her appeal lessened. But during the thirties, thanks to Adolphe Barreaux's clean, etching-like artwork, she was easily as popular as Dan Turner. A rival magazine, Saucy Detective, even ripped her off, offering their own Sally the Sleuth strip. A Paul Jason was responsible for her alternate adventures, and they were terrible.

Sally ended her days in Private Detective looking like a typical fifties comic book character. The stories had grown to a full eight pages in length, but their sexy appeal was a thing of the past. Sally just wasn't the same with her clothes on. Adolphe Barreaux had assumed the job of editing what was left of the Trojan line, and a different, more mundane artist drew Sally's wardrobe.

By that time, the Spicies were a memory. And the gaggle of tough-guy dicks were also a memory in the pages of Speed Detective--except for the occasional reprint. The series character was pretty much dead. But the immortal Dan Turner kept chugging along. Trojan even gave him a magazine of his own, Dan Turner, Hollywood Detective. Not content to feature the usual Turner short story that continued to grace the pages of Speed Detective, Hollywood Detective (as it was known in a final incarnation) boasted three Dan Turner yarns per issue. True, some of them were reprints, but no matter. How many other characters rated that kind of a showcase?

As a futile gesture to variety, Bellem concocted a Dan Turner clone

Continued on p. 29

Walt
Murphy
&
Bob Pine

JULIE de Grandin

PSYCHIC SLEUTH

"THE STRIPPED SPECTRE
OF SUNNY SIDE!"







Risque Review

Winds of the World Press has done a great favor to those of us infatuated with the Spicies who lack the spare cash to buy the original pulps themselves.

What a Gall Sally the Sleuth. 116 pp. \$4.95.

Pulp-itations: The Graphic Art of Spicy Detective Stories. 100 pp. \$4.95.

Spicy Detective Encores #1. 108 pp. \$3.95.

(Available from Winds of the World Press, P.O. Box 921, Framingham, MA 01701.)

Yes, it looks like interest in the Spicies is bursting out all over! These three little books (each measure about 5½ x 4½ inches) are samplers of the various charms of the Spicies. The first reprints eight of Barreaux's comic strip adventures of Sally the . . . er, Sleuth, the undercover detective who never managed to stay under any kind of cover for long! Pulp-itations is a random collection of illustrations, including captions, from Spicy Detective. It's amazing how often the men hit the women in these stories! The best of the three is Spicy Detective Encores #1. The series will offer three or four stories by a single author in each issue. This time, the spotlight is on Dan Turner, Robert Leslie Bellem's self-parodic hard-boiled dick. The stories are "Beyond Justice," "Cat Act" and "Blackmail from Beyond." Those who enjoy his wild exploits may find more of them in Popular Press's Dan Turner Hollywood Detective (1983) and in William Kittredge

and Steven M. Krauzer (ed.) The Great American Detective (1978).

Spicy Adventure Stories #1. \$20.00.

Spicy Mystery Stories #1. \$20.00.

Snappy Adventure Stories #1. \$14.00.

Snappy Mystery Stories #1. \$14.00.

Snappy Detective Stories #1. \$14.00.

(All available from Richard Hale-gua's Fantastic Things, P.O. Box 24527, Huber Heights, OH 45424. Add \$3.00 for shipping.)

So scarce were the first issues of all these pulps that researchers actually theorized they had never been printed. As it turns out, they were almost right. For purposes of compliance with mysterious copyright laws, Trojan Publications issued only token minuscule runs of these titles, containing reprints from other magazines like Breezy Stories. They intended to begin real distribution only with the second issue. A New York pulpologist unearthed copies of the elusive number ones in 1985, and now they are available in black and white (like the originals) facsimile. Each contains only two or three tales, each of them only three or four pages. For the most part, only the covers indicated what was to come from number two onward. Spicy Adventure #1 has one Robert Leslie Bellem tale, "The Shanghai Jester," which would have fit better in Snappy Detective. The covers of both Snappy and Spicy Mystery depict naked women about to be tortured by hooded menaces, but the inside contents are not only disappointing but totally innocuous. Again, these were only file fodder never intended for real distribution. They are of enormous interest in terms of pulp history and are wonderful curiosities for your collection. Pay the rent next month.

Readers' Rendezvous

I have read only No. 3 of Risqué Stories, but I think you may need more variety of mood. Somehow it all seemed to me dark and threatening.

Woman of the Witch Flowers---frightened people, lonely darkness

House of Dark Desire--unhappy wife, enslaved husband

Pale Shadow--darkness, dreaminess

Jungle Curse--frustrated lusts, dangers, compulsions

The Gift--deception, revenge

The only happiness described is for the wife in "The Gift" (but not for long) and apparently for the two in "Pale Shadow."

Harry Mongold
Mahattan, IL

Risqué Stories #3 was good fun, even if it was not as thoroughly "spiced" as the first two issues. Jacobi's "Woman of the Witch-Flowers" was rich with atmosphere and pulpy tension. I hope that we see more tales, both old and new, from Mr. Jacobi.

The highlight of the issue was, as usual, the John Gorman story by Hoffman and Cerasini. These guys really know how to write a spicy adventure. The headlong pace and lush descriptions are absorbing, but the real fun comes from the authors' obvious familiarity with Robert E. Howard. From Gorman being a "Black Celt" to the heroine's mass of "foamy" hair, Hoffman and Cerasini stir as much Howard into their story as they can. And it works beautifully.

In closing, I'd like to defend Tara from Jim Bosclair and Pierre Comtois. Though "hotter" than the original spicy fare, Tara is still miles away from being "out and out

porno." Mr. Bosclair ought to visit his local adult bookstore to acquaint himself with the wretchedness of real pornography. Tara's adventures are not the greatest thing in Risqué Stories, but I am not averse to them at all.

The only problem with Risqué Stories is the intervals between issues. How can I wait a whole year for another John Gorman story?

Chris Hocking
Wayne, MI

Risqué Stories #3 came a few days ago. I liked most everything except Lin Carter's yarn, which was slight. The best of the issue was "Jungle Curse" by Hoffman and Cerasini. Hoffman and Cerasini are doing REH's unfinished work justice. Murray on the "Spicy" authors was most interesting to myself, as a collector of pulpwood classics. Please keep Hoffman, Cerasini, and Murray writing for you. Jacobi and Cave were in fine form; it's always good to see these fine pulp authors keeping their hand in. Great stuff! I look forward to number four.

Daniel Gobbett
Riverdale, MD

Stumbled across a copy of Risqué Stories #3 while looking around Forbidden Planet in New York. I wasn't even aware such a magazine existed! There are some things The Writer's Market doesn't prepare you for, I guess. Some interesting stuff there, though I'd personally prefer more stories with a contemporary setting. "The Gift" was the standout in this issue, with "Pale Shadow" coming in second.

Dan Persons
New York, NY

The John Gorman story in Risqué Stories #3 was excellent, as was Cave's "House of Dark Desire". Julie de Grandin was good, but I feel it should have been longer. The art was reminiscent of some of the better DC strips (Deadman, Batman) and I suspect the similarity may have been intentional.

Charles Garofalo
Wayne, NJ

New Risqué looks swell: great cover, juicy interiors. Reader Comtois is quite right--my "Tara" stories owe nothing to the "Spicy" tradition. Tell him when you first mentioned plans for Risqué to me and asked if I'd do a yarn for it, I looked dubious, then said what I could do was write a couple new Tara stories, maybe, with an eye towards eventually weaving them into a sequel to the first novel.

But the three new Tara stories owe nothing at all to the "Spicy" style and tradition. Sorry Reader Bosclair disliked "Tara of the Twilight" so, but he's in excellent company: Sprague and Catherine de Camp loathed it, too.

I'm always puzzled by people who have such an intense dislike of explicit erotica . . . (are you there, Sigmund?) . . .

Lin Carter
Montclair, NJ

Thank you for Risqué. Despite visual problems, I read with great interest the inside story of the Spicies and their tricks during the closing years. Frank Armer as your author states, was strictly level. Wilton Mathews appears to have been a nice guy who fouled up a good start. My footnote to that essay, which I am clipping and filing in the archives, is this: that about the time "Spicy" was changed to "Speed" and less emphasis put on raw meat, Mathews wrote me (and presumably others) that we should destroy our carbons of "spicy" stories. Hints as to censorship crackdowns. I did so. Since I never read stories by other authors--my business is writing and selling, not tail-sitting and reading--it was only by coincidence that I finally suspected funny work. However, I did not suspect trickery of the sort which finally sank Mathews. I assumed that, with evil days closing in, Trojan, like others, had the botswain pipe "Man the pumps, you sons of bitches!" I did not suspect forgery. My compliments to the contributor.

E. Hoffmann Price
Redwood City, CA

EROTIC UNIVERSE: SEXUALITY AND FANTASTIC LITERATURE.

Donald Palumbo (ed.)

This comprehensive volume explores the relationship between sex and the fantastic in science fiction and fantasy literature. More than a dozen scholars have contributed essays in which they discuss almost two hundred novels, short stories, tales, plays, poems, myths, and nearly one hundred authors—from Aldiss to Zelazny. The collection is divided into three main sections, the first of which is devoted to the theoretical analysis of the relationship between sexuality and the fantastic. This section contains essays on sexuality and the allure of fantasy, and sexuality and knowledge in science fiction. The second section turns to thematic analyses and includes essays that explore such themes as sexuality and death, forbidden sexuality, sexual attitudes and the search for ethics in contemporary culture, sex and technology, sexual encounters with aliens, sexuality and comedy, and homosexuality in fantasy and science fiction. The third section, devoted to feminist views of sexuality in fantastic literature, includes several studies of the depiction of sexuality in the works of female fantasists, and focuses most closely on Russ, Piercy, LeGuin, and Carter. Examined here is the potential use of science fiction as a vehicle for theorizing about women and for questioning their condition in society. The volume also includes an introductory overview and critical commentary on the literature and a comprehensive, contributor-compiled bibliography of primary works and scholarship on sexuality and related issues in fantastic literature.

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